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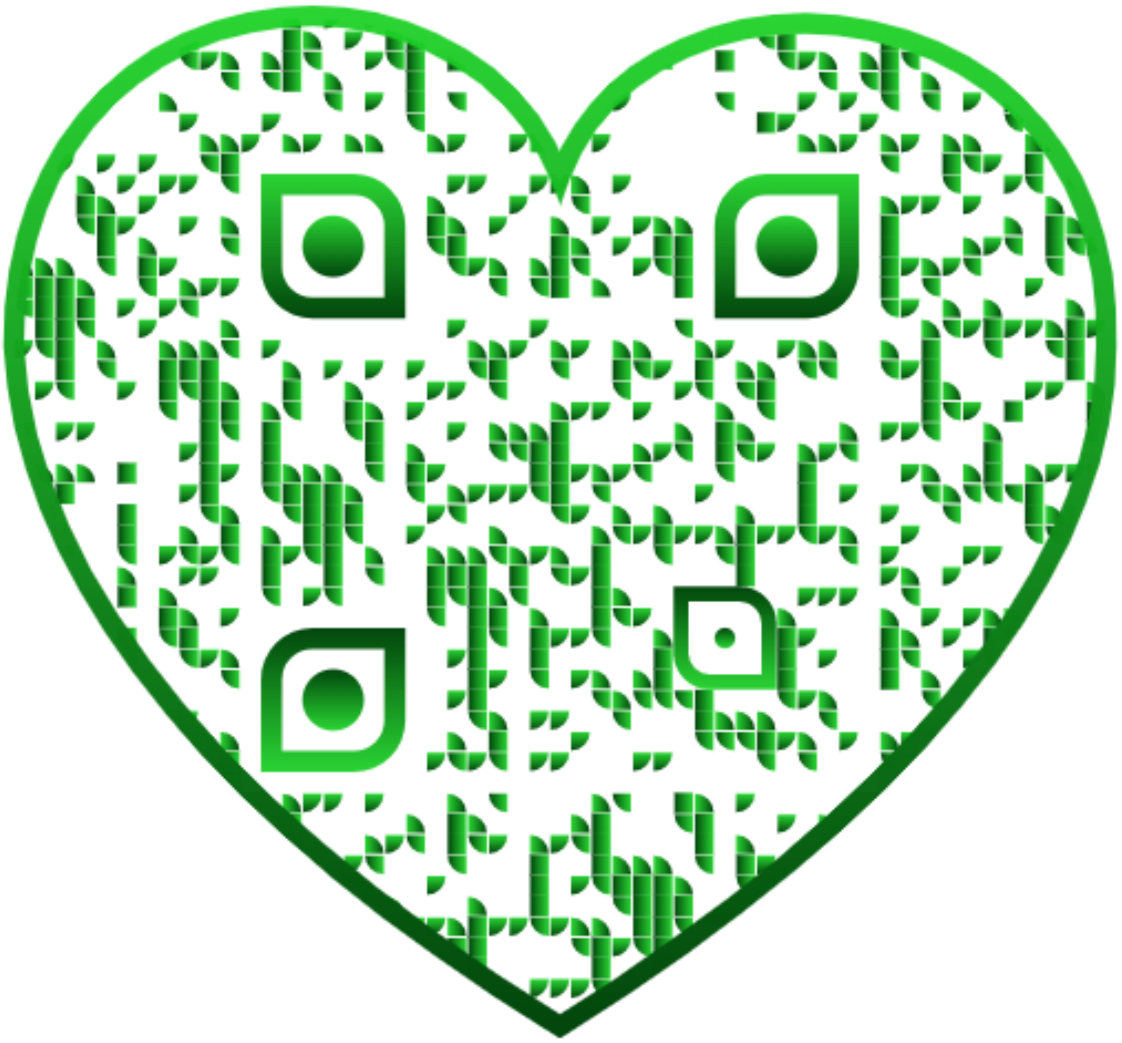

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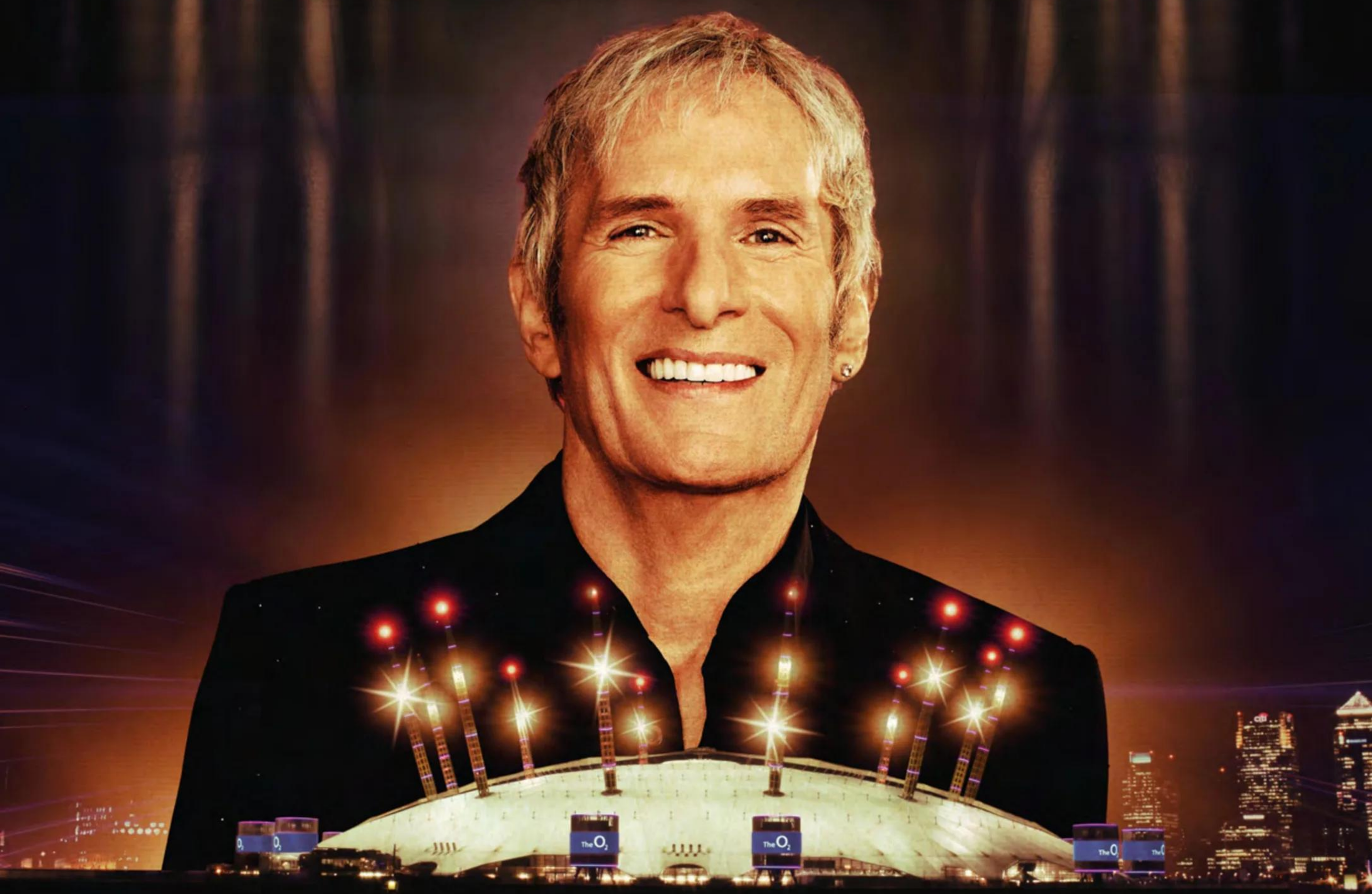

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RETROPOP CONTENTS

FEATURES

36 SAINT ETIENNE The band celebrates their Top 10 breakthrough 'So Tough'

44 GO WEST Peter Cox and Richard Drummie talk 'Dancing On The Couch'

50 2024 ANNIVERSARIES The biggest pop milestones from the past four decades

60 SHED SEVEN Rick Witter and Paul Banks present their Youth-produced LP

66 PALOMA FAITH Introducing her new album 'The Glorification Of Sadness'

72 EMF Ian Dench discusses the group's brilliant new record

78 SANDI THOM The singer-songwriter opens up on her exciting new chapter

84 INTRODUCING... BRYN CHRISTOPHER He's written hits for Melanie C and Sigala - now he's stepping into the spotlight

LINE-UP

4 FLASHBACK The Stranglers' Hugh Cornwell looks back

6 PLAYLIST This month's most exciting releases

7 TOTP TALES Howard Jones' 1983 *New Song* performance

12 EUROVISION Malmö 2024 performers and stage design

16 INSIDE THE GROOVE Madonna's 'Evita' and 'Ray Of Light'

18 CHART CLIMBERS The songs that took the longest to reach the top

22 QUICK READ Cher gets candid in London

25 IN THE MIX Toby Gad revisits his catalogue

26 QUICK READ Bassist Chris Constantinou on his work with Adam Ant

28 PICTURE SPECIAL An Audience With Kylie Minogue

31 FLASHBACK The Primitives' Paul Court talks middle-aged moshing

26 QUICK READ Starsailor's James Walsh introduces their latest LP

REGULARS

8 NEWS The latest from your favourite pop stars

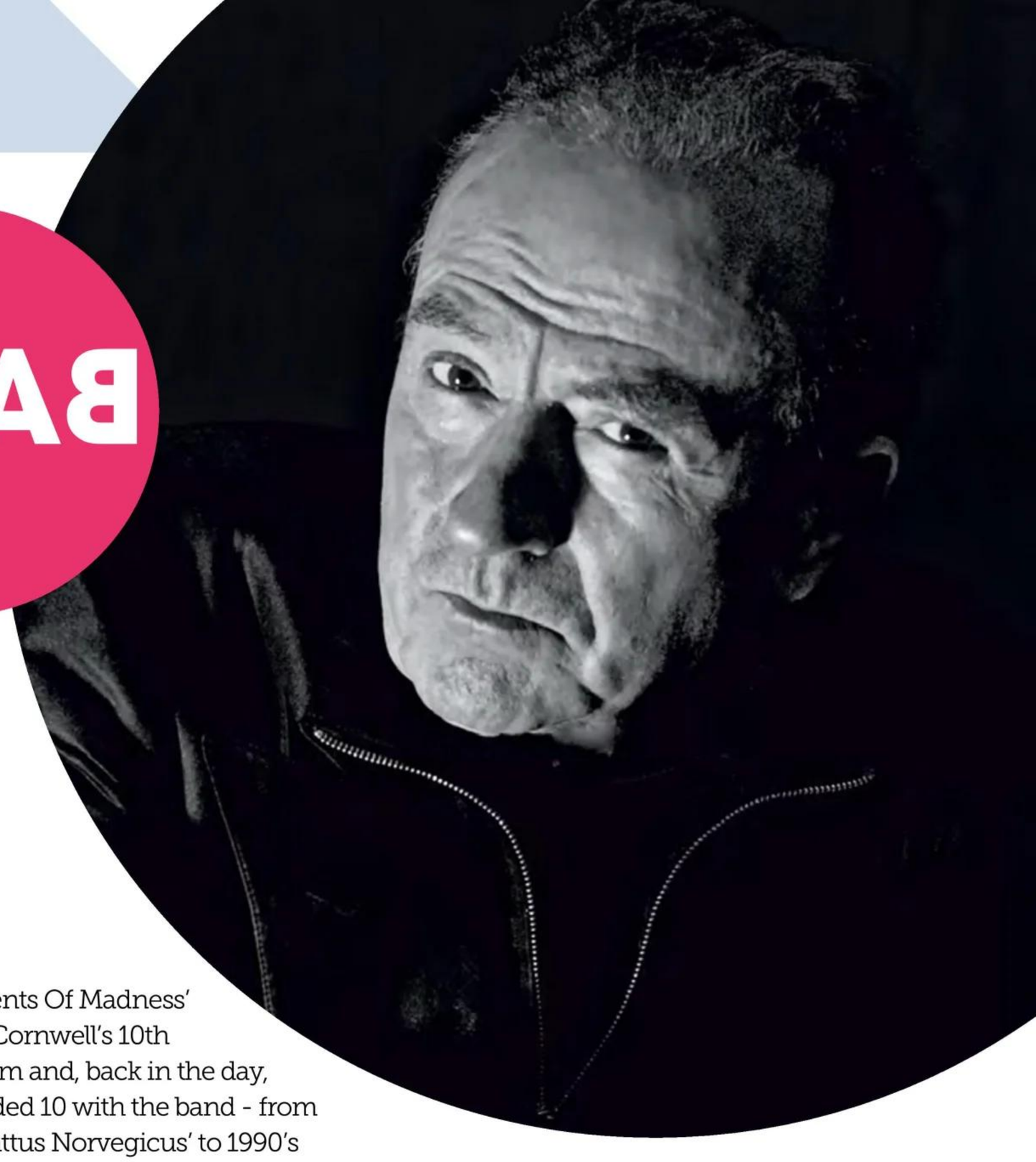
REVIEWS
88 ALBUMS
91 REISSUES
95 COMPILATIONS

96 COMING SOON Your up-to-date release radar

98 QUIZ Is your boy band knowledge up to scratch?

FLASHBACK

HUGH CORNWELL



Revisiting his years with The Stranglers and celebrating his 10 solo albums, **Hugh Cornwell** is raring to return to the road!

"If I don't keep busy, I start thinking and then I get depressed," admits Hugh Cornwell of his impressive work ethic in a career that's sustained across five decades.

The former Strangler served as lead vocalist and guitarist for the punk rock and new wave band from 1974 to 1990, before recording a further 10 solo studio albums and continuing to attract crowds on the live circuit.

With the group, he penned such classics as *Golden Brown*, *Always The Sun*, *Peaches* and *No More Heroes*, but on his latest solo recording, 2022 LP 'Moments Of Madness', he goes one step further, self-producing the record with all instruments also played by Cornwell himself.

"We got to that stage through a long period of evolution and I work very closely with my engineer, who's got a great ear and knows what I like," he admits, insisting the path to producing his own material was laid largely by chance. "For a long time, we used to make high quality demos for whichever producer I was working with, but it got to the stage where my manager said, 'It's crazy to re-record these, why don't you just finish them off?' Which is what we did..."

This time around, there was one different experience for the multi-instrumentalist. "What's new on this one was that I played bass," he smiles. "I started off as a bass player in a school band with Richard Thompson from Fairport Convention. He taught me to play bass and so I thought, this time around, I should play bass on it."

'Moments Of Madness' marked Cornwell's 10th solo album and, back in the day, he recorded 10 with the band - from 1977's 'Rattus Norvegicus' to 1990's '10' - but having pushed forward in the 34 years since leaving the act, it's his later works he'll focus on during his upcoming UK tour. "I've now been out of the band for twice as long as I was in it," laughs the musician. "So my journey has gathered a lot of things to look back on and on this tour I'm pulling out stuff from all my solo records, which is great for me, because on the last few tours I've been doing a set of my solo offerings and then and then a set of Stranglers songs. But this time, it's all one mixed set with an accent on my solo catalogue."

Having assembled a "basic rock and roll set-up" of a band - guitar, bass and drums - with the additional players all adept vocalists, it also allows him to revisit some of The Strangles' earliest material as it was originally intended. "A lot of people don't realise that the first Stranglers songs were written and conceived as a trio," he notes. "When Dave [Greenfield, keyboards] joined, he just added bits to what we already had worked out, but songs like *London Lady*, for example, weren't conceived with keyboards in mind. *Hanging Around* works great as a trio too, it's the same story there. Just a lot of people don't realise."

Keys remained part of his band line-up for a while after leaving the group, but Cornwell says he "realised they were filling in a lot of space" and sought to take his work back to a more classic sound. "One of the aspects of rock and roll that I've always liked is the edginess that you get from space. You don't have to fill in every bit of silence and it creates an edge, which I think is appealing to people," he adds. "So when I did 'Moments Of Madness', something I always had in my mind was, 'Leave a bit of space and let the song speak in the silence'."

It may be a sound that leans into his earlier years, but Cornwell finds it "remarkable" that he's still attracting crowds - and new fans - to this day. "I know that there's a new generation of youth that's discovered the old songs and testament to that is The Stranglers on the road - even with just one [original] member it's very popular. So it's been rediscovered, and the reason it's been rediscovered is because good work shines - and it always will shine!"

With "pre-production" already happening for his next project, the hitmaker shows no sign of slowing down, and presented with a time in his solo catalogue that parallels the moment he exited The Stranglers, Cornwell deadpans: "Well, I'm not leaving this band!" **RP**

● ***Hugh Cornwell with very special guests The Primitives tour the UK with eight shows between January 17 and January 27.***

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

RETROPOP

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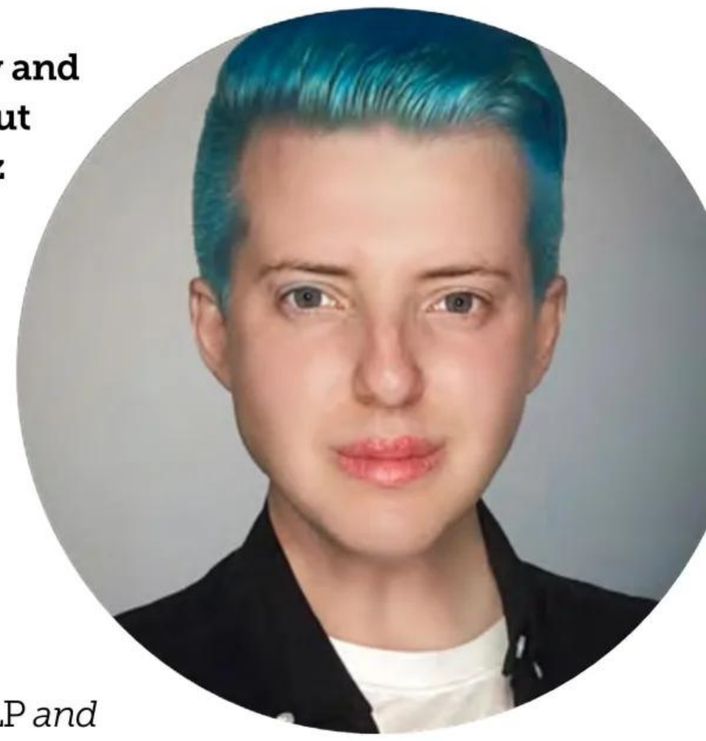
HAPPY NEW YEAR!



I hope you've had a restful holiday and a good start to 2024. I've just about recovered from all the festive fizz and can't wait to return to planet pop for RETROPOP's most exciting year yet!

Kicking things off, we're going back to the '90s with a celebration of 'So Tough', the fabulous second album from Saint Etienne that took them straight into the UK Top 10 and featured the classic hit single, *You're In A Bad Way*.

With exclusive commentary on the LP *and* some exciting news about what the rest of 2024 holds for Saint Etienne, it's a joy to have the band as this month's cover stars.

There's plenty more from the decade in the pages of this edition, as we catch up with EMF and Shed Seven, both of whom have brilliant new albums out over the next few weeks, hear from '80s duo Go West on their 'Dancing On The Couch' reissue and '00s chart-topper Sandi Thom on her new music, and step into the mind of Paloma Faith for an introduction to her new album, 'The Glorification Of Sadness'.

We also kick off the countdown to Eurovision 2024 as we meet the first cohort of performers who'll take to the Malmö stage - including the UK's own Olly Alexander - and get a preview of the sensational set design, plus we take you inside Cher's recent live event in London, revisit Kylie Minogue's Royal Albert Hall takeover, and spotlight the classic albums from the past four decades that are set to hit major milestones over the next 12 months.

As always, it's a jam packed issue - enjoy, and I'll see you again in four weeks' time...

Connor Gotto, Editor
@MrConnorGotto

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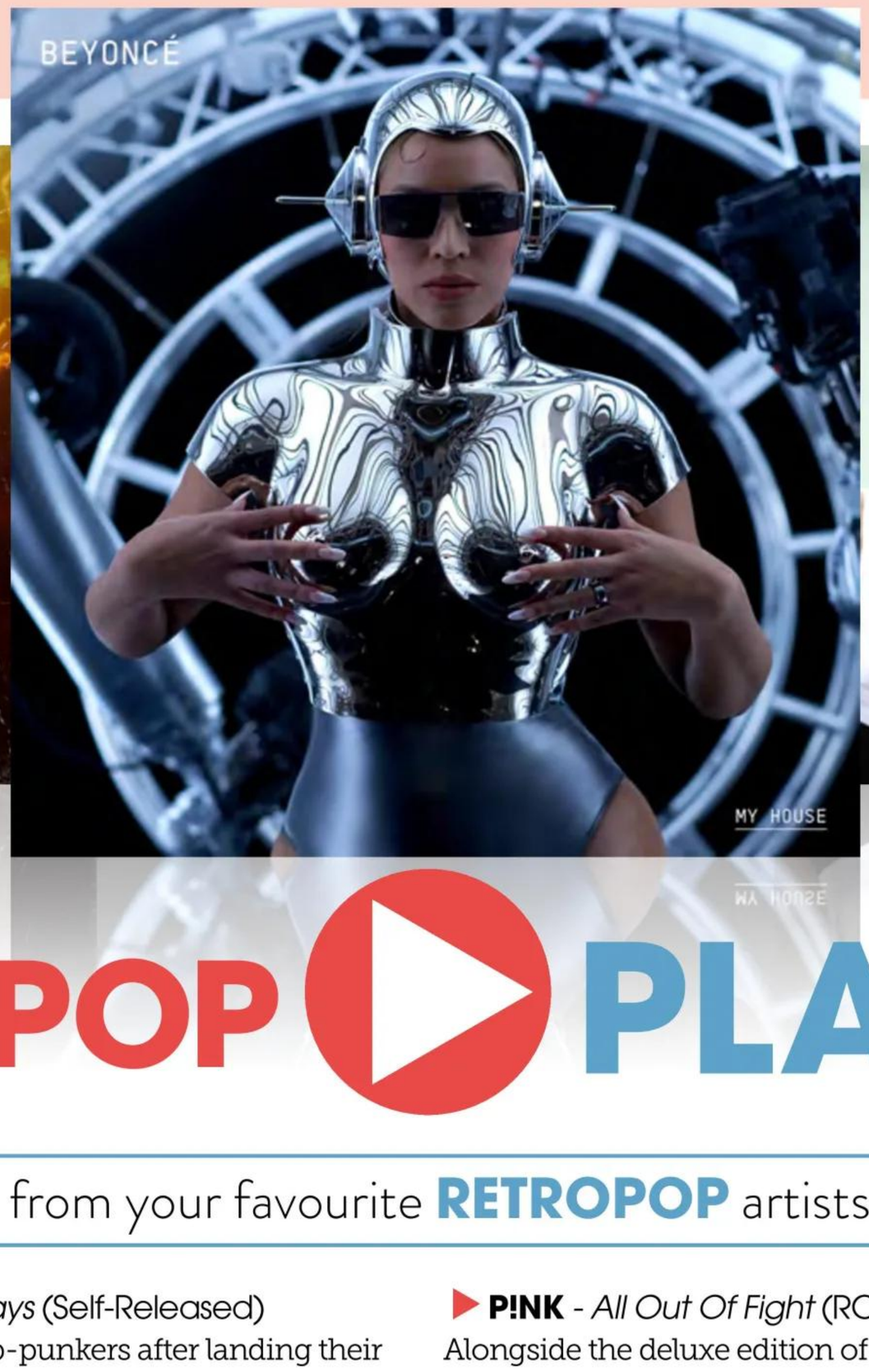
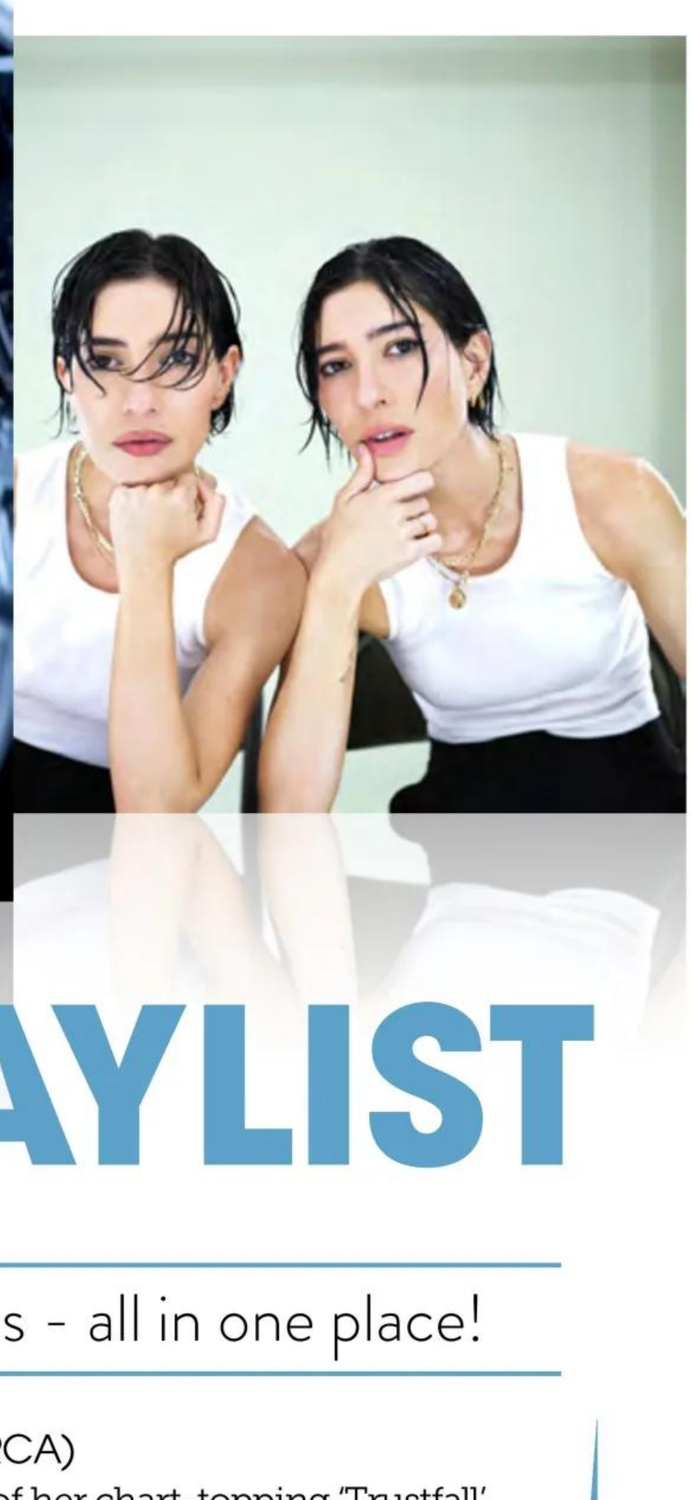




RETROPOP PLAYLIST

The latest releases from your favourite **RETROPOP** artists - all in one place!

BUSTED - *One Of These Days* (Self-Released)
The first track from the '00s pop-punkers after landing their first No. 1 album with 'Greatest Hits 2.0' leans into the past while channelling a refreshing confidence as they embark on their next chapter.

BEYONCÉ - *My House* (Columbia)
On the back of her global, record-breaking 'Renaissance World Tour', the superstar returns with a stomping anthem that switches up mid-way to become an epic house moment, throwing back to her previous LP while nodding to the future.

THE VERONICAS - *Detox* (Big Noise)
Lifted from their sixth album, 'Gothic Summer', and tapping into the pop rock soundscape that made them household names 20 years ago, the Origliasso sisters are back doing what they do best.

SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR - *Blossom Of The Night* (Cooking Vinyl)
A deluxe edition of 'HANA' - her first Top 10 studio LP in almost a decade - delivered a brand new outtake from the sessions, tapping into the underlying themes of the album and conjuring a fantastical world out of its locked-down origins.

SANDI THOM - *Silence* (GAmusic)
A stunning comeback from the *I Wish I Was A Punk Rocker (With Flowers In My Hair)* singer, layered harmonies make up for a sparse instrumental arrangement on the lead release from 'Warpaint'.

P!NK - *All Out Of Fight* (RCA)
Alongside the deluxe edition of her chart-topping 'Trustfall' album, P!nk serves up a powerful piano ballad, laced equally with heartbreak and inner strength, epitomising the very best of her latest era.

JAMES ARTHUR - *Sleepwalking* (Columbia)
A more anthemic offering from his new album, 'Bitter Sweet Love', its latest single brings together a plethora of influences that gel to form the 'James Arthur sound', while keeping his distinctive vocal front and centre.

LANA DEL REY - *Take Me Home, Country Roads* (Polydor)
Nothing is coincidental when it comes to Lana Del Rey and after namechecking John Denver on *The Grants*, she surprise-released a stunning, piano-led version of his 1971 classic.

SHED SEVEN - *Talk Of The Town* (Cooking Vinyl)
Spearheaded by a driving and folksy acoustic guitar, the fifth pre-release track from Shed Seven's first album in - ironically - seven years sees the band at the top of their game, once again offering a different side to their sound.

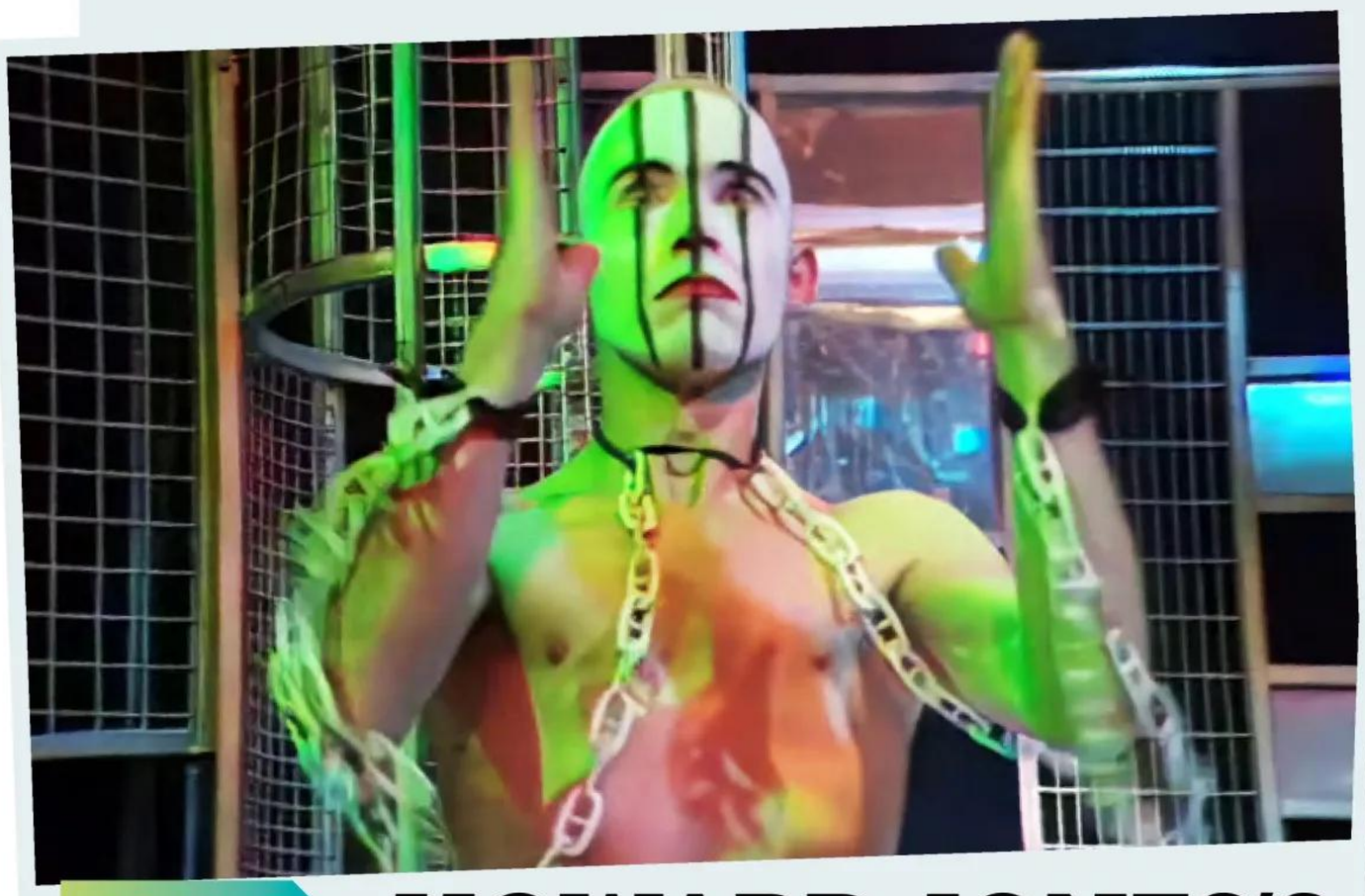
KEANE - *Love Actually* (Island)
Originally written for inclusion in the classic movie, the band marks the 20th anniversary of this outtake from their debut album - a stunning mid-tempo complete with heart-tugging Tom Chaplin vocal - by including it on their latest re-release.

HOW TO LISTEN

Scan the QR code and check out all the **RETROPOP** *playlists in one place, over on Spotify!*

Top Of The Pops *tales*

Step back in time as we revisit classic moments from the 'Top Of The Pops' archives!



#21 HOWARD JONES'S CHAIN OF COMMAND

September 22, 1983: Howard Jones – *New Song*

Literal interpretations of lyrics were a standby of 'Top Of The Pops' in the '70s, when Legs & Co would wag a finger at Golden Retrievers as Gilbert O'Sullivan sang *'You're a bad dog, baby'*. And they made a triumphant return in 1983, when Howard Jones made his 'TOTP' debut.

As the cockatiel-haired keyboardist sang of *throwing off your mental chains*, a shirtless mime pranced about to his left – face painted white, with three black lines suggestive of prison bars; chains running from a collar to both wrists.

This wasn't the idea of the producer, or a flack at label WEA, but came about organically. Jed Hoile (Jeremy to his mum) had been part of Jones' live set-up for a couple of years, as he took his one-man show around pubs in High Wycombe. The two became friends after meeting in a record shop. Later, Hoile acted as a sort of roadie at early gigs, setting up the equipment. Then he started to interpret the music.

"The philosophical content of Howard's songs touched me and I'd just spontaneously danced along in support," Hoile told the Bucks Free Press in 2003. This caught the singer's eye during a gig at a pub called the Fleur de Lys. "I just couldn't stop watching him," Jones told the paper. "I thought, 'He shouldn't be down there, he should be up here on stage.'"

The act then developed an alternative cabaret element. "We had showroom dummies on the stage and Jed would dress in chains," Jones told Stereogum in 2022. "Sometimes he'd be a lizard, and sometimes he'd be a businessman, or a punk, or a robot."

"In one song, Howard would 'die' and come back as a ghost," Hoile told The Guardian in 2022. "In another I used to come out of the audience and 'shoot' him with a gun."

So when the call came from the BBC, Jed went too. "It was really enjoyable," he told the documentary, 'The Story Of Top Of The Pops: 1983'. "It was a fascinating experience working in about six inches of space, because the studio was *tiny*."

Hoile also accompanied his friend on other TV appearances – supplementing the chains with silver tinsel for a Christmas 'TOTP'! Though his interpretative skills were not always understood... as he revealed to The Guardian: "When we did 'Saturday Superstore' they wouldn't let me wear the chains, because they thought it was some sort of weird fetish thing!" **RP**

● ***Follow @TOTPFacts on Twitter for live trivia commentary on the BBC Four repeats.***

WORDS IAN BERRIMAN **PHOTOS** BBC / TOP OF THE POPS

TOP 10
THE OFFICIAL CHART FOR SEPTEMBER 18, 1983

1 CULTURE CLUB
Karma Chameleon

2 UB40
Red Red Wine

3 PEABO BRYSON AND ROBERTA FLACK
Tonight I Celebrate My Love

4 PAUL YOUNG
Come Back And Stay

5 GENESIS
Mama

6 RYAN PARIS
Dolce Vita

7 MODERN ROMANCE
Walking In The Rain

8 DAVID BOWIE
Modern Love

9 STATUS QUO
Ol' Rag Blues

10 ROD STEWART
What Am I Gonna Do

LINE-UP NEWS

GO GIRLS G-G-GO GO GO

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Due to massive demand, Girls Aloud have extended their reunion tour to double the run that was originally announced.

Throughout May and June, Nadine Coyle, Cheryl Tweedy, Kimberley Walsh and Nicola Roberts will play a total of 30 shows across the UK - up from the 15 that first went on sale.

"We have been completely blown away by the love, support and excitement we've received for our #TheGirlsAloudShow 2024 tour," they shared. "We've been VERY busy planning an epic show for you all and we can't wait to be back on stage."

The concerts mark Girls Aloud's first tour as a four-piece following the death of Sarah Harding and they're said to be in the midst of a "bidding war" for a concert movie documenting their return to the stage after more than a decade.

"Since the news of Girls Aloud's reunion their management have been bombarded with offers for all sorts of things, particularly loads of TV and streaming specials," sources told The Sun's Bizarre column. "Girls Aloud regularly filmed and released their tours on DVD back in the day but things have moved on, so they have been interested to hear what other options are on the table."

Having already sold over 200,000 tickets, demand is high and companies are "keen to land the rights to their show," the insider added.

"They are very careful about what they do, though, because they don't want to exploit their legacy or do anything that cheapens their brand.

"It is important that they are all in complete agreement when it comes to accepting any offers on the table."

Tickets are on sale now. Head over to our website for links to buy.

One foot in the past

Following massive demand from fans, Steps' first three albums are finally coming to vinyl!

The group's classic LPs – 'Step One' (1998), 'Steptacular' (1999) and 'Buzz' (2000) – will arrive on wax on February 23 with a variety of pressings.

Included is an Amazon exclusive StepSwirl™ pressing, neon coloured vinyl and a zoetrope picture disc, bringing to life a video from each album.

"It's nearly Christmas and do we EVER have a treat for you... our first three albums are going to be made available on vinyl for the very first time," said the group.

"You've been asking for this for a long time and we hope you love them!"

All three are available to pre-order now. Head over to our website for links to buy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

IN THE LOOP

PAUL YOUNG has announced a 40th anniversary reissue of 'No Parlez'

CHER won't join the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame for a "million dollars", after repeated snubs

BEYONCÉ released *Grown Woman* digitally to mark 10 years of her self-titled album

BANANARAMA have added a third London Palladium show in April

BOOMANIA IN LONDON

Betty Boo is returning to the stage this summer for a headline show at the Islington Assembly Hall.

The *Doin' The Do* hitmaker will perform hits from her three albums – 'Boomania' (1990), 'GRRR! It's Betty Boo' (1992) and 'Boomerang' (2022) – plus songs from her forthcoming LP, at the homecoming show on June 15.

"Exciting news my Booettes! I'll be bringing the Boo house down at @islington_ah on Saturday 15th June," she wrote in an announcement. "Expect all your favourites, plus a few from my brand new album, but more on that very soon!

"I'd love to see you there. So grab your dancing shoes and let's make it a night to remember."

Tickets are on sale now. Head over to our website for links to buy.

PHOTO SANDRO HYAMS

Who meets The Beatles

The Beatles are set to feature in a new episode of the forthcoming series of 'Doctor Who'.

The first season of the long-running sci-fi series to feature Ncuti Gatwa in the title role will see the Time Lord step back in time and encounter the Fab Four.

Speaking at a screening of 2023 Christmas special, 'The Church On Ruby Road', showrunner Russell T Davies revealed: "[The Christmas special is] completely different to the next episode, isn't it? And then the one after that, that's The Beatles... that's nuts!"

Further details of the *Here Comes The Sun* group's appearance have yet to be revealed, however it's not the first time The Beatles have featured on the show; back in 1965, footage of the band performing *Ticket To Ride* was included in the serial 'The Chase', starring William Hartnell.

'Doctor Who' - also starring former 'Coronation Street' actress Millie Gibson as Ruby Sunday - returns in the spring on BBC/Disney+.

PHOTO BBC/BAD WOLF/DISNEY

TAKE THAT are planning to hit the studio with **JAX JONES**, according to the DJ

NOEL GALLAGHER'S HIGH FLYING BIRDS are returning to the stage for a run of summer shows

U2 will play their final shows at the Las Vegas Sphere in March

THE POGUES frontman **SHANE MACGOWAN** has died aged 65

LINE-UP NEWS

BLUR TAKES A BACKSEAT

Blur are embarking on a fresh hiatus following their chart-topping 2023 reunion.

The band reconvened to release 'The Ballad Of Darren' – their first album in eight years – last summer, but as they headed toward the end of their latest run of shows in South America, frontman Damon Albarn confirmed they're taking a break.

"It is time to wrap up this campaign," he told French publication Les Inrockuptibles, as translated by Far Out Magazine. "It's too much for me. It was the right thing to do and an immense honour to play these songs again, spend time with these guys, make an album, blah-blah-blah."

He added: "I'm not saying I won't do it again, it was a beautiful success, but I'm not dwelling on the past."

The group – also starring Graham Coxon, Alex James and Dave Rowntree – may have sold out venues worldwide, including multiple nights at London's Wembley Stadium, but Albarn has plenty to look forward to in the months ahead.

In addition to having an opera coming out, he is also preparing to start work on another album with his animated group Gorillaz with Jamie Hewlett.

Their latest LP, 'Cracker Island', featured collaborations with Stevie Nicks, Tame Impala and Beck and also landed the musician at No. 1 in the UK, making it the first Gorillaz album to reach the top spot since 'Demon Days' (2005).

PHOTO PHOEBE FOX

Rebels on the road

In support of their latest, chart-topping best-of album, 'Rebel Diamonds', The Killers will return to the road with a UK and Ireland arena tour over the summer.

Marking the band's 20th anniversary with 20 hits from their catalogue, the LP gave the band their eighth UK No. 1 and will be followed by a huge run of shows, launching June 12 in Dublin, Ireland.

Across a total of 16 concerts, Brandon Flowers and co. will perform in Manchester, Glasgow and London, with Scottish group Travis joining them as the opening act for the shows.

Tickets are on sale now. Head over to our website for links to buy.

PHOTO TODD WEAVER

IN THE LOOP

MADNESS have announced a huge outdoor UK tour for the summer

DOLLY PARTON's 'Rockstar' gave the country icon her highest-charting US album ever

Over two dozen master tapes featuring rare **MICHAEL JACKSON** demos have been removed from auction by his estate

S CLUB singer **JON LEE** wants to group to represent the UK at Eurovision

THE BOYS ARE BACK

Pet Shop Boys will release their 15th studio album - their first in four years - in the spring.

The follow-up to 'Hotspot' (2020) is produced by James Ford and was confirmed by the *West End Girls* hitmakers in a post announcing the publication of 'Annually 2024'.

The book is out May 10 and includes "an in-depth look at the new album (set for release in Spring 2024) including artwork, lyrics, and a diary of the creative process with commentary from PSB", along with "a feature about the album cover photo-session" and "an interview with [James Ford], producer of the album".

'Annually 2024' is available to pre-order from Pet Shop Boys' official store.

Before then, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe will release their 'Dreamworld' concert film, which documents the synth-pop duo's greatest hits tour live from the Royal Arena in Copenhagen, in cinemas on January 31 and February 4.

Captured live by director David Barnard in a 14-camera shoot, the movie offers "a lavish stage show and mesmerising visual backdrops in front of an exuberant, sold-out audience", according to a news release.

Tickets are on sale now. For full details, head over to our website.

PHOTO PELLE CREPIN

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Evolution in me

Sheryl Crow is coming to the UK for a fresh run of outdoor concerts.

Following the release of her 11th studio album, 'Evolution', on March 29, the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame inductee will play four gigs across the country in June.

Beginning at The Piece Hall in Halifax on June 13, she'll also play Kent's Black Deer Festival and Nocturne Live in Oxfordshire, before headlining Hampton Court Palace Festival in London on June 18.

Of her latest album - an unexpected return, after she previously walked away from recording - Sheryl says: "This music and these lyrics came from sitting in the quiet and writing from a deep soul place. I said I'd never make another record, thought there was no point to it. But this music comes from my soul. And I hope whoever hears this record can feel that.

"Everything is more song oriented now with streaming, and making an album is a huge endeavour. I started sending just a couple of demos to Mike, but the songs just kept flowing out of me and it was pretty obvious this was going to be an album."

Tickets are on sale now. Head over to our website for links to buy.

BILLY JOEL will be joined by **CHRIS ISAAK** for a one-off show at Cardiff's Principality Stadium this summer

ROD STEWART has joined forces with **JOOLS HOLLAND** on their new album 'Swing Fever'

RADIOHEAD are getting ready to return after having a "little break"

JOSS STONE is to play her first ever headline gig at London's Royal Albert Hall over the summer

KOOL & THE GANG drummer and co-founder, George 'Funky' Brown, has died aged 74

EUROVISION SONG CONTEST MALMÖ 2024

The UK crowns its Eurovision king

With Eurovision season on the horizon, the first performers have been confirmed - including Years & Years star **Olly Alexander**!

UNITED KINGDOM

PERFORMER: Olly Alexander
AGE: 33
SONG: TBA
DID YOU KNOW: In addition to collaborations with Elton John, Kylie Minogue and Pet Shop Boys, he's also a BAFTA-nominated actor!

Olly Alexander has Eurovision victory in his sights as he emerges as the next star to represent the United Kingdom at this year's Eurovision Song Contest.

The Years & Years singer will take to the stage in Malmö, Sweden in the spring in a bid to improve upon Mae Muller's disappointing 25th place finish in 2023.

Olly's participation was revealed during the final of 'Strictly Come Dancing' in December, during which he told host Claudia Winkleman: "I love Eurovision so much, it's a dream come true. I'm just so, so excited."

In a press release, he added: "I've loved watching Eurovision ever since I was a little kid and I'm beyond excited to be taking part next year.

"As a young boy I always looked forward to this incredible event of unbridled joy, the wonderfully chaotic mix of musical styles, theatrical performances, heartfelt emotion and humour.

"I really can't believe I'm going to be a part of such a special legacy and fly the flag for the UK in the gayest way possible, it shall be an honour!

"I've wanted to do this for a long time and it feels like the right moment to start releasing music under my own name. I'm determined to give it everything I've got and put on an excellent and unforgettable performance for you all!"

Olly has scored hits across Europe, including *Desire*, *King* and *If You're Over Me*, and his Eurovision entry is co-written by the pop star with Danny L. Harle, who has produced hits for Dua Lipa and Charli XCX, among others.

"It's gonna be electronic, something you can dance to," he told BBC News. "But I can't say much more than that.

"I just can't wait to get out there and meet the fans and everyone else taking part," he added.

"It's going to be the wildest experience of my life."

ALSO PERFORMING AT MALMÖ 2024

BELGIUM

PERFORMER: Mustii
AGE: 33
SONG: TBA
DID YOU KNOW: He's also a judge on 'Drag Race Belgique' - Belgium's edition of the 'Drag Race' franchise!

FRANCE

PERFORMER: Slimane
AGE: 34
SONG: *Mon Amour*
DID YOU KNOW: Since winning France's 'The Voice' in 2016, he's sold two million albums and earned two billion worldwide streams!

NETHERLANDS

PERFORMER: Joost Klein
AGE: 26
SONG: TBA
DID YOU KNOW: Last summer, Joost had a number 1 hit in Germany, Switzerland and Austria with *Friesenjung*, which has had over 100 million streams worldwide!

CYPRUS

PERFORMER: Silia Kapsis
AGE: 17
SONG: TBA
DID YOU KNOW: She released her debut song, *Who Am I?*, in 2022 - which she had written and composed at the age of 12!

GREECE

PERFORMER: Marina Satti
AGE: 36
SONG: TBA
DID YOU KNOW: She previously represented Greece in the EBU's Euroradio Jazz Orchestra, performing works by Peter Herbolzheimer!

SLOVENIA

PERFORMER: Raiven
AGE: 27
SONG: *Veronika*
DID YOU KNOW: She's entered several songs for Eurovision over the years, including *Črno Bel* (2016), *Zažarim* (2017) and *KAOS* (2019)!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO
PHOTOS MATT HEALY, RTBF, CyBC, FT, ERT, AVROTROS, TJAŠA BARBO

EUROVISION REMAINS 'UNITED BY MUSIC'

Swedish broadcaster SVT and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) have unveiled the theme art for the 68th Eurovision Song Contest: 'The Eurovision Lights'.

Created by combining the northern lights and the harmonic rhythm of sound equalisers, the concept is based on simple linear gradients and can be adapted according to need and devices in an array of colours and formats.

It's accompanied by the slogan, 'United By Music', which originated during the 2023 edition of the Contest and will remain for all future editions going forward. Previously, a different slogan had been used at the event every year since 2002, except in 2009 when no slogan accompanied the Contest.

Martin Österdahl, the Executive Supervisor of the Eurovision Song Contest, says: "The Eurovision Song Contest is more than just a song competition; it's a celebration of the power of music to bring people together. After over 20 years of using different slogans, and as we approach our 70th anniversary, we feel we have found one that truly encapsulates our brand.

"By establishing a permanent slogan, we will have consistency in our message that music unites us all. It's the perfect slogan to underline our values of inclusivity, equality, universality and celebrating diversity through music.

"As the popularity of the Eurovision Song Contest continues to grow around the world, we believe using the same slogan annually will help our brand become even stronger. "

LIGHTS UP!

It may still be months away, but plans for the transformation of the Malmö Arena are already underway!

Designed by Fredrik Stormby from the Sweden-based Green Wall Designs, the elaborate stage for the 68th Eurovision Song Contest - set to host performances from across Europe and beyond - has been unveiled.

Renowned as one of the world's leading creative studios for crafting captivating visual experiences in the world of live entertainment, Stormby will head up the creative division, working alongside the senior production team along with production designer Florian Wieder, to help create, design and deliver a large-scale and spectacular show to a global audience of over 160 million.

Fredrik Stormby is the show's Lighting and Screen Content Designer

With a knack for crafting captivating visual experiences in the world of live entertainment, specialising in video, lighting and scenic elements, the team has contributed to some of the most thrilling live productions in recent memory, such as Loreen's winning performance at the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest, alongside 'ABBA Voyage' and Beyoncé's 'Renaissance World Tour'.

The Eurovision set-up is a unique 360-degree experience that surrounds the audience and viewers in the Malmö Arena. The stage is placed in the middle of the audience and shaped like a cross. Movable LED cubes, LED floors, light, video, and stage technology will be able to create great variations in the arena.

It's a format that puts the audience more in focus than ever before and viewers will experience a visually revolutionary concept, with the stage placed in the centre of the arena and the focal point of the design a monumental installation - a "centre piece" of video and light above the stage, where the lighting design is designed to embrace the artists and their performances.

Together, these elements make it possible to create many unique looks for the various entries, thus bringing live and TV audiences closer to the action.

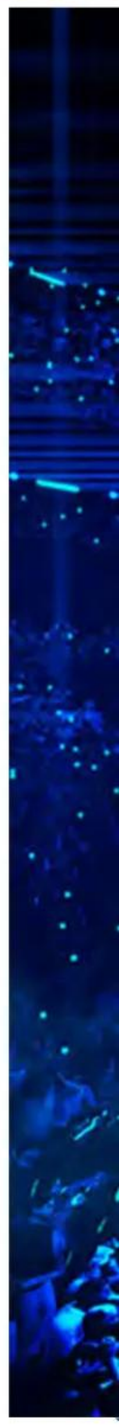
With an aim to execute the event exclusively using LED and laser light sources to achieve lower constant power consumption, the lighting design for the 2024 Contest encompasses approximately 2,000 light fixtures and 12 follow-spot systems.

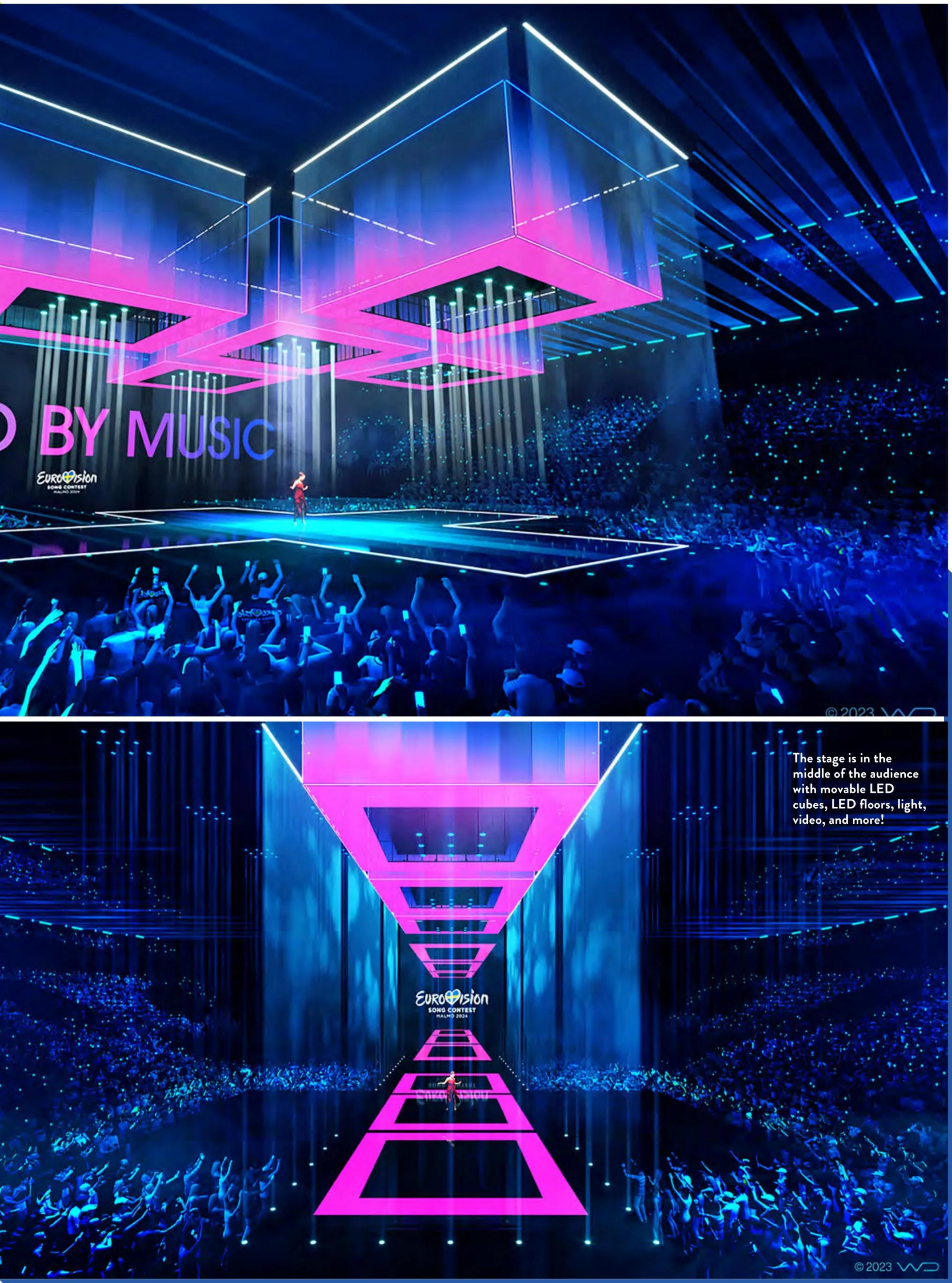
Stormby says: "We believe that together we have created what is an unexpected and updated concept for

the Eurovision Song Contest 2024 and are looking forward to showing it off for real! I am honoured to have been commissioned to design the light and video in collaboration with the team from our studio, and the production team that SVT has put into place for the project.

"We've developed a strong concept together, and I'm really looking forward to the continued collaboration in production, the creative process with the delegations, and eventually getting my teeth into the show and doing the broadcasts!"

Sharing his joy at being "part of the Eurovision family again", Wieder adds: "Putting together an exceptional show is a team effort and I'm proud to be part of a dream team of professionals – just the right constellation of people to come up with something different and new. We all have the same vision of what this show should be and how to take Eurovision to the next level, and for me Sweden is always a guarantor of good music and entertainment." **RP**





The stage is in the middle of the audience with movable LED cubes, LED floors, light, video, and more!

As **Madonna** revisits 40 years of success with her global 'Celebration Tour', the hosts of the Inside The Groove podcast explore how she became an icon and the most successful solo female recording artist on the planet!

INSIDE THE GROOVE

● *For more Madonna, listen to Inside The Groove wherever you get your podcasts.*

EVITA RELEASED: November 1996

Originally a 1976 concept album, before opening as a theatre production in the West End two years later, plans for a movie version of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's musical about the life of Eva Peron were in development for over a decade before Madonna was cast in the lead role.

Eva was born to a poor family in Argentina before becoming First Lady. An enigmatic and powerful character who became known as Santa Evita amongst her supporters, she died at 33. So determined was Madonna to win the role, she sent a six-page handwritten letter to director Alan Parker to beg for the part.

In preparation, the multi-hyphenate turned to vocal coach Joan Lader to develop a technique that would help her perform the huge range of songs that had been made famous first by Julie Covington in 1976, then by Elaine Page in London, before being perfected by Patti LuPone when the show opened on Broadway in 1979. The results were astonishing; Madonna not only greatly increased her vocal range in terms of its pitch, but also gained a fuller, more rounded tone that was a world away from the nasal, Minnie Mouse sound of her early '80s recordings.

Before filming began, the cast assembled in London in October 1995 to record the soundtrack. The initial session was a disaster with all the parties – Madonna, co-star Antonio Banderas, the director, and writers Rice and Lloyd Webber - deeply unhappy with the situation. Madonna had been particularly upset, saying that she felt petrified having to sing her vocals live in front of a full orchestra. Despite an all-smiling publicity shot taken that afternoon, crisis talks followed and it was agreed that Madonna could record her vocals in a more personal environment.

Filming followed in 1996. The shoot was torturous for Madonna – firstly because of opposition from die-hard Peronists, then the heat, then the fact that Madonna discovered that she was pregnant half-way through the production.

The hard work paid off; her performance was largely praised and she would receive a Golden Globe the following year. Whilst she was snubbed by the Oscars for her acting, her singing would help *You Must Love Me* – an original song written for the movie – to win an Academy Award. Madonna would perform the song live at the Oscars in 1997, proving once and for all that she had transformed from a pop starlet to an accomplished singer.

Madonna worked with Peruvian fashion photographer Mario Testino on the cover photography for the album. Shot at the Paris Theatre, Miami in November 1997, Madonna had reinvented herself as an "Earth Mother", complete with long-tousled locks and tan (albeit fake) for a radically different image from the alabaster Monroe-look of previous albums.

Wearing a range of designer outfits by the likes of Dolce & Gabbana and Jean-Paul Gaultier, the pair didn't feel they had their key image until a relaxed moment towards the end of the day.

This would be the first release to be art directed by Kevin Regan, who also created the clean, classic typography for the sleeve and a design that followed through the first two singles of the campaign.

WORDS EDWARD RUSSELL, JONATHAN PRYCE & PETER FALLOON **PHOTO** JEAN-BAPTISTE MONDINO

RAY OF LIGHT RELEASED: March 1998

Undoubtedly Madonna's magnum opus, 'Ray Of Light' arrived at a time when – whilst not written off – Madonna's career had made a huge diversion from the pop scene. With no tour to support 'Bedtime Stories' (1994), Madonna had turned to ballads and a musical soundtrack, leading many to believe that the raunchy popstar-turned-mother had mellowed. In reality, she had spent the previous year creating an album that would finally establish her as a songwriter and producer with her finger on the pulse, creating a sound that would influence the direction popular music would take.

She began writing with long-term collaborator Patrick Leonard, composing songs like *Frozen* and *Nothing Really Matters*. Melodically on a par with their '80s hits, Leonard had struggled with Madonna's desire to have a more modern production sound. She had been heavily-inspired by British trip-hop artists and wanted to find a new direction that melded those beats with her new vocal range – even richer since the birth of her first child, Lourdes Leon.

Writing more songs with Stevie Nicks collaborator Rick Nowels, who she had met on a shopping expedition in New York, the material was there, but it wasn't until her then-A&R rep, Guy Oseary, suggested a meeting with British Producer William Orbit that Madonna found the direction she was seeking.

The pair entered the studio in Los Angeles that summer. Orbit reworked the existing songs, adding his signature bleeps and beats and often restructuring the songs completely. For *The Power of Goodbye*, he transposed Nowels' chorus from a minor key to a major, completely altering its feel.

As well as writing a handful of new songs together, Madonna added her vocal and additional production to a few tracks Orbit had in his arsenal. *Candy Perfume Girl* is almost note-for-note the same as Susannah Melvoin's demo, but it was the song *Ray Of Light* that would prove pivotal. Brought to Orbit the previous year by singer Christine Leech, it had started life as a folk track, written by her uncle in the early 1970s. Madonna may have added only a few lyrics to her version, but her changes to the production and astonishing vocal performance – possibly her greatest ever – transformed the song.

Released the following year, 'Ray Of Light' was a critical and commercial success, launching a second phase for Madonna's career with a newfound respect from the previously sometimes-tepid musical press. The album would win four of its six Grammy nominations and, at last count, sold over 16 million copies.

ROCKIN' TO THE TOP

Some tracks go straight to the top of the charts, but for others it's a slow burn - taking weeks, months, or even years to finally reach **No. 1**!

65 YEARS

Last year, Brenda Lee's *Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree* finally hit No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, marking the song's first stint at the top in its 65-year history.

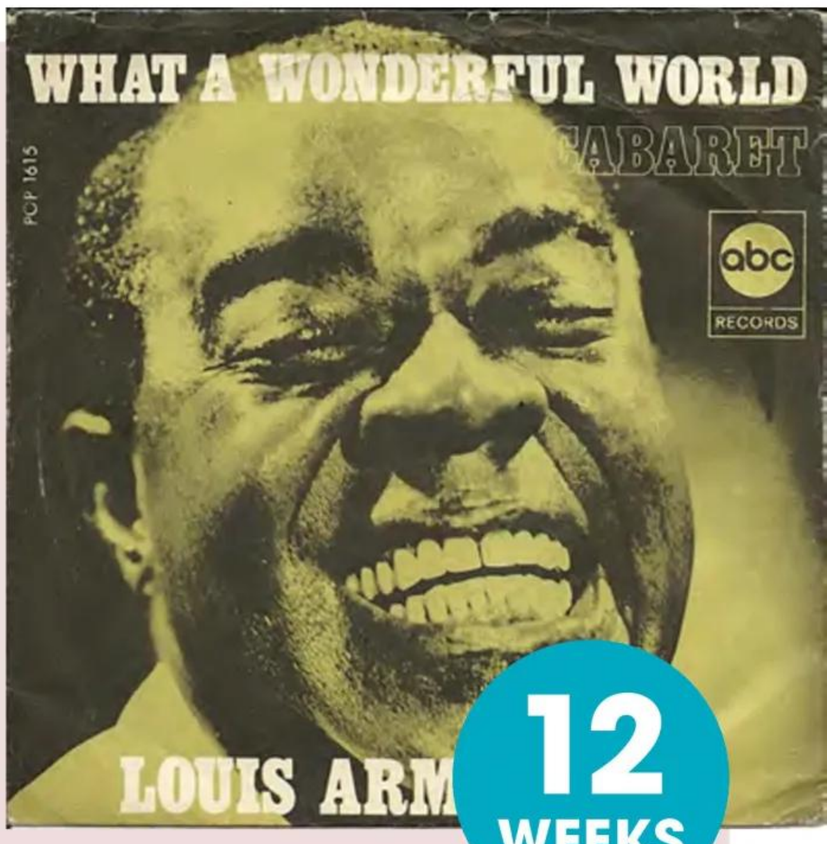
The single has become a mainstay in the Top 10 of the US Billboard Hot 100 in recent years over the festive period, but finally topped the rundown during the first week of December, pipping Mariah Carey to the post and breaking her record for a song's longest climb to the top.

With nearly 35 million streams and 21 million radio impressions, according to data provided by Luminate, it marks Lee's third No. 1 – after *I'm Sorry* and *I Want To Be Wanted* – and her first since 1960.

In another feat, it's also only the third seasonal song to peak at No. 1, following Mariah Carey's *All I Want for Christmas Is You* and *The Chipmunk Song* by the Chipmunks with David Seville.

Lee – who recorded the song when she was only 13 years old and becomes the oldest artist to hit No. 1 at 79 – recently released its first official music video as part of a push for the top spot.

She may hold the US record, but with a UK peak at No. 4 the history books look a little different...



12 WEEKS

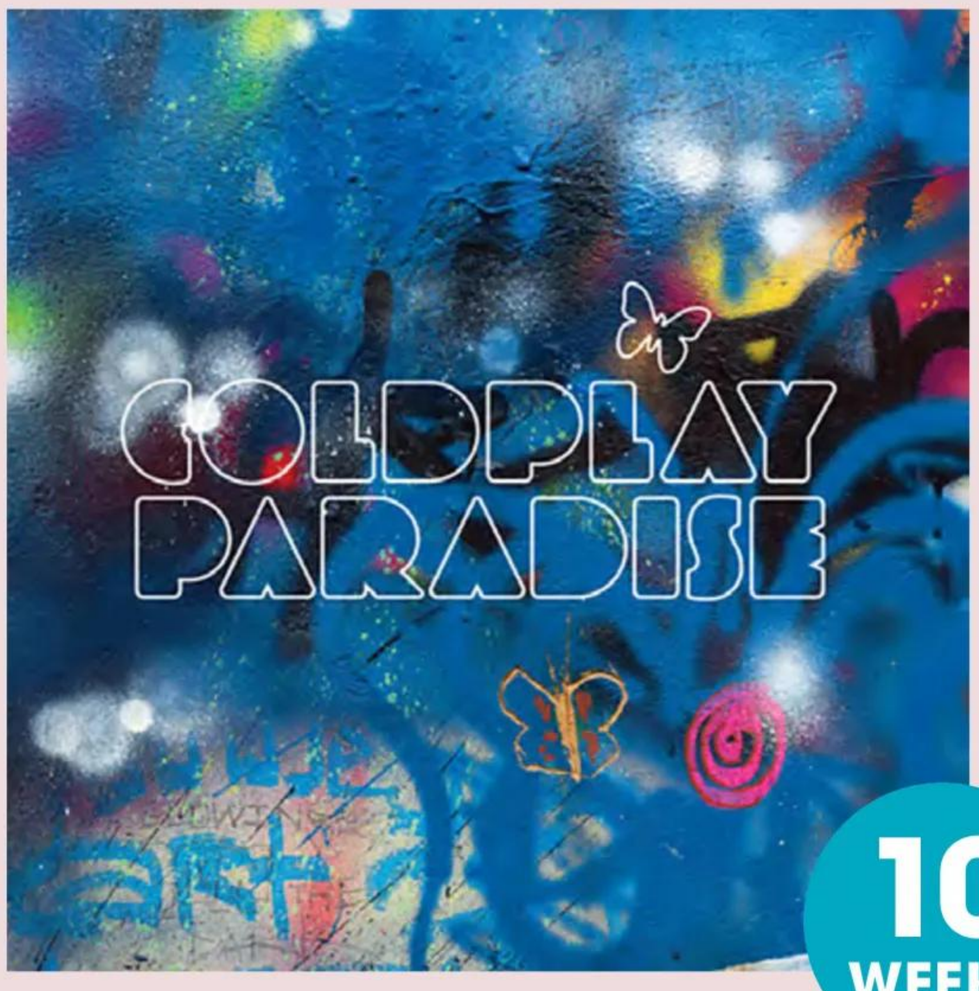
LOUIS ARMSTRONG
What A Wonderful World

A cover version of choice for many, *What A Wonderful World* has found itself at the top of the UK charts thanks to a small handful of artists, but it was Louis Armstrong that first took the smooth ballad to No. 1 back in 1968, a whole 12 weeks after it was first released. Backed by a version of the theme song from the musical 'Cabaret', it spent a month at the top in the spring and hung around for 14 more weeks in the Top 100, through to the end of August. In 2007, it was also a No. 1 for Eva Cassidy and Katie Melua, this time debuting at the summit.

17 WEEKS

DEAD OR ALIVE
You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)

Documenting their journey from the underground to commercial acclaim, Dead Or Alive's classic Stock Aitken Waterman collaboration took 17 weeks to hit the top spot following its 1984 No. 79 debut. According to Pete Burns, the label were so unenthusiastic about the track that he took out a £2,500 loan to work with SAW - who had already had hits with Divine and Hazell Dean - and his decision paid off, with the single giving the group and their producers their first No. 1s and paving the way for some of the defining hits of the decade.

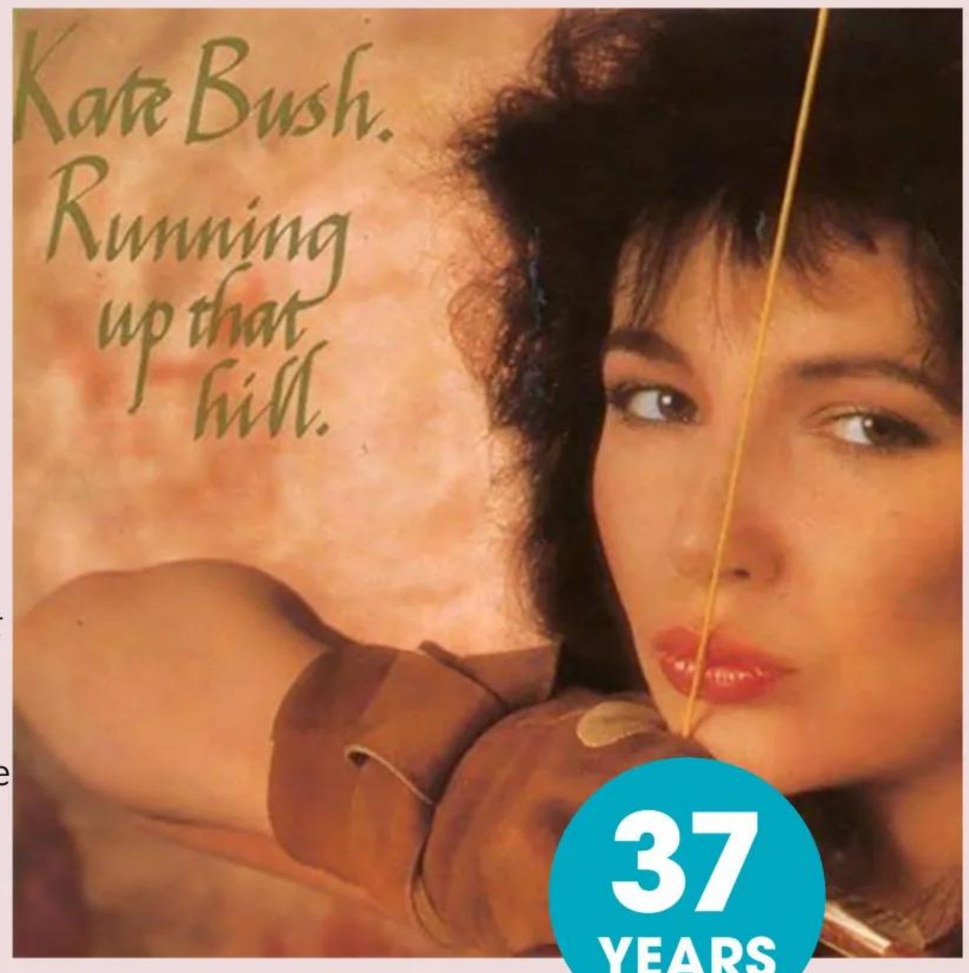


10 WEEKS

COLDPLAY *Paradise*

The second single from Coldplay's fifth album, 'Mylo Xyloto' (2011), had such an unusual chart trajectory that, for a while, a stint at the top of the charts seemed like an impossibility. According to the band's website, the single was not initially chart eligible because it was available on iTunes as an "instant grat" when pre-ordering the album, but following its release it entered at No. 14 and hung around inside the Top 20 for nine weeks before finally reaching No. 1.

KATE BUSH
Running Up That Hill



37 YEARS

When it was originally released as the lead single from her fifth studio album, 'Hounds Of Love' (1985), *Running Up That Hill* peaked at No. 3 on the UK charts, at the time becoming her highest-charting track since her 1978 debut, *Wuthering Heights*. In 2012, it reached No. 6 thanks to a remix with re-recorded vocals that was used at the London Olympics closing ceremony, but it was a decade later that it finally hit the top spot - in the UK and in eight countries worldwide - after being featured in the fourth series of Netflix's 'Stranger Things'.

WHAM! *Last Christmas*

In the four decades since its release, Wham!'s festive single rose to become a holiday classic, but it was another Xmas mega-hit - Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas*, on which George Michael also performed - that held them off the top spot back in 1984. After many chart runs in subsequent years over the Christmas period, including three more weeks at No. 2, the song finally reached No. 1 in the UK on New Year's Day 2021, giving the duo their fifth chart-topper. *Last Christmas* previously held the record as the highest-selling single never to top the charts, with 1.9 million copies sold.

36 YEARS

26 YEARS

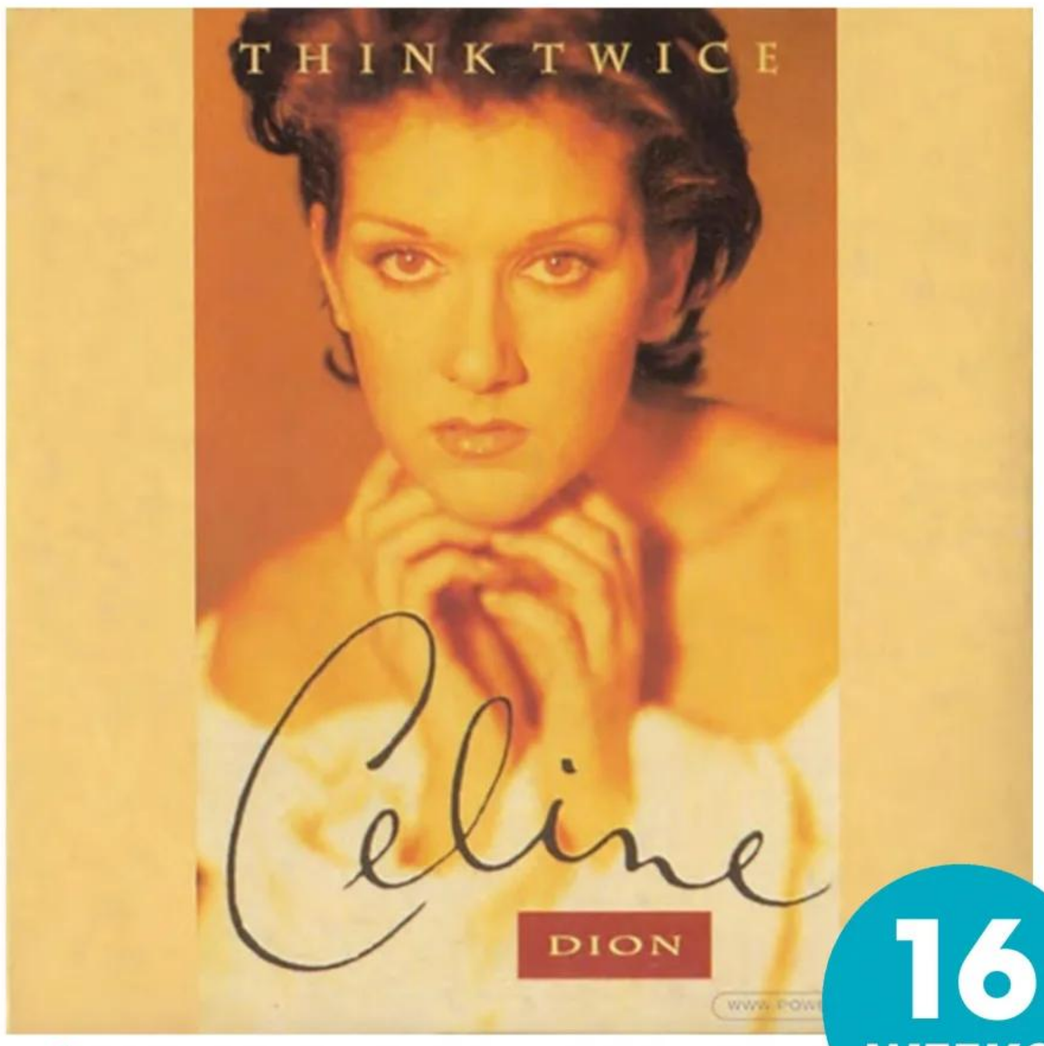
MARIAH CAREY
All I Want For Christmas Is You

Another holiday hit that settled at No. 2 upon its initial release - behind East 17's *Stay Another Day* - the song that earned Mariah her Queen Of Christmas status became a modern-day standard in the years after its release, but it wasn't until a quarter of a century later that it finally reached the top of the Billboard Hot 100 in the States, matching the success in the UK the following year. The song has sold 16 million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling digital singles of all time.

10 WEEKS

LADY GAGA *Poker Face*

Since the very start of her career, all signs pointed towards Lady Gaga becoming a global superstar - and if ever there was a sign of her longevity it's in her second single, *Poker Face*, and its climb to the top of the charts. While her debut, *Just Dance*, entered at three and rose the following week to No. 1, *Poker Face* rose steadily through the Top 40 in a 10 week run, entering the Top 20 in its sixth week, going Top 10 the next and finally reaching its peak after a trio of nail-biting weeks.



16 WEEKS

CÉLINE DION *Think Twice*

The third single from the Canadian vocal powerhouse's third English-language album, 'The Colour Of My Love' (1993), *Think Twice* was the definition of a slow burn on the UK charts in its epic climb to the top spot. After 16 weeks in the Top 100 (13 in the Top 40 and eight inside the Top 10), the ballad - written by Andy Hill and Peter Sinfield - finally reached the summit in February 1995, where it stayed for seven consecutive weeks. It went on to sell over one million copies and spend a further nine weeks in the Top 100.

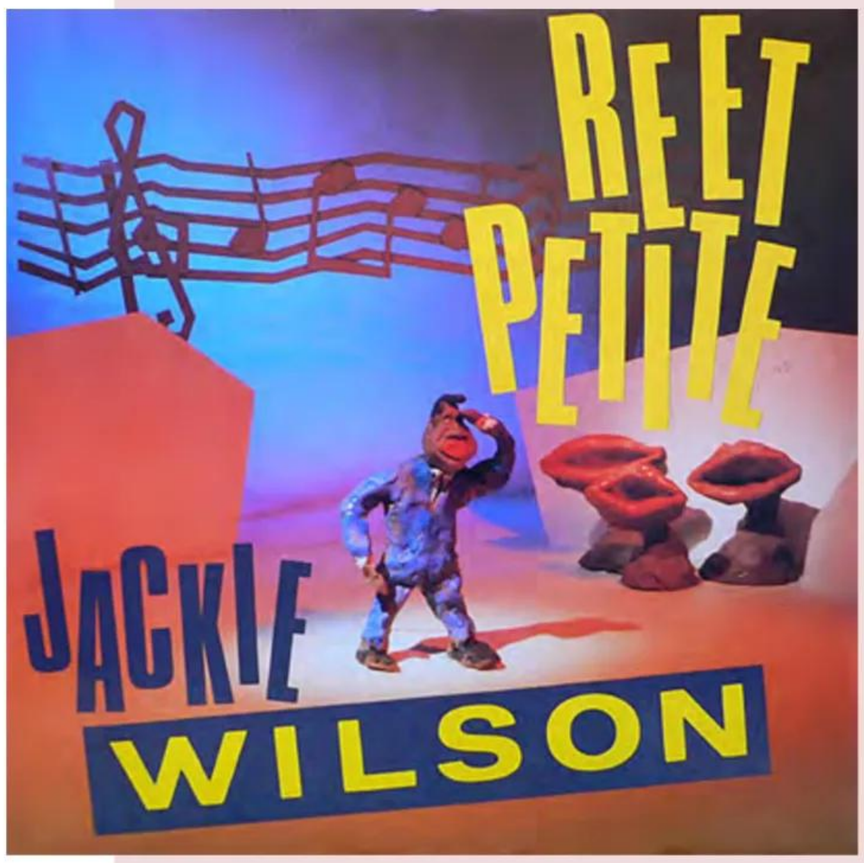
JENNIFER RUSH *The Power Of Love*

When it was first released in late 1984 in Germany, Jennifer Rush's epic power ballad failed to make waves on the pop charts, but a year later things changed and the track enjoyed meteoric success - even if it did take a little more time to get there. Released in June and eventually hitting No. 1 in October, the track was the first ever million-seller by a female solo artist in Britain and the biggest selling single in the UK in 1985. It also held the record for the largest-selling single ever by a woman until Whitney Houston's 1992 smash *I Will Always Love You*.

17 WEEKS

JACKIE WILSON *Reet Petite*

Written by Berry Gordy, Billy Davis, and Gwen Gordy Fuqua, and made popular by Jackie Wilson with his 1957 recording, *Reet Petite* was the singer's first solo recording and peaked at No. 6 on the UK charts following its initial release. Proceeds from the track enabled Gordy to fund the launch of Motown Records, and almost three decades later, in 1986, it returned to the charts, this time clinching the Christmas No. 1 spot on the back of a reissue following Wilson's death almost three years prior.

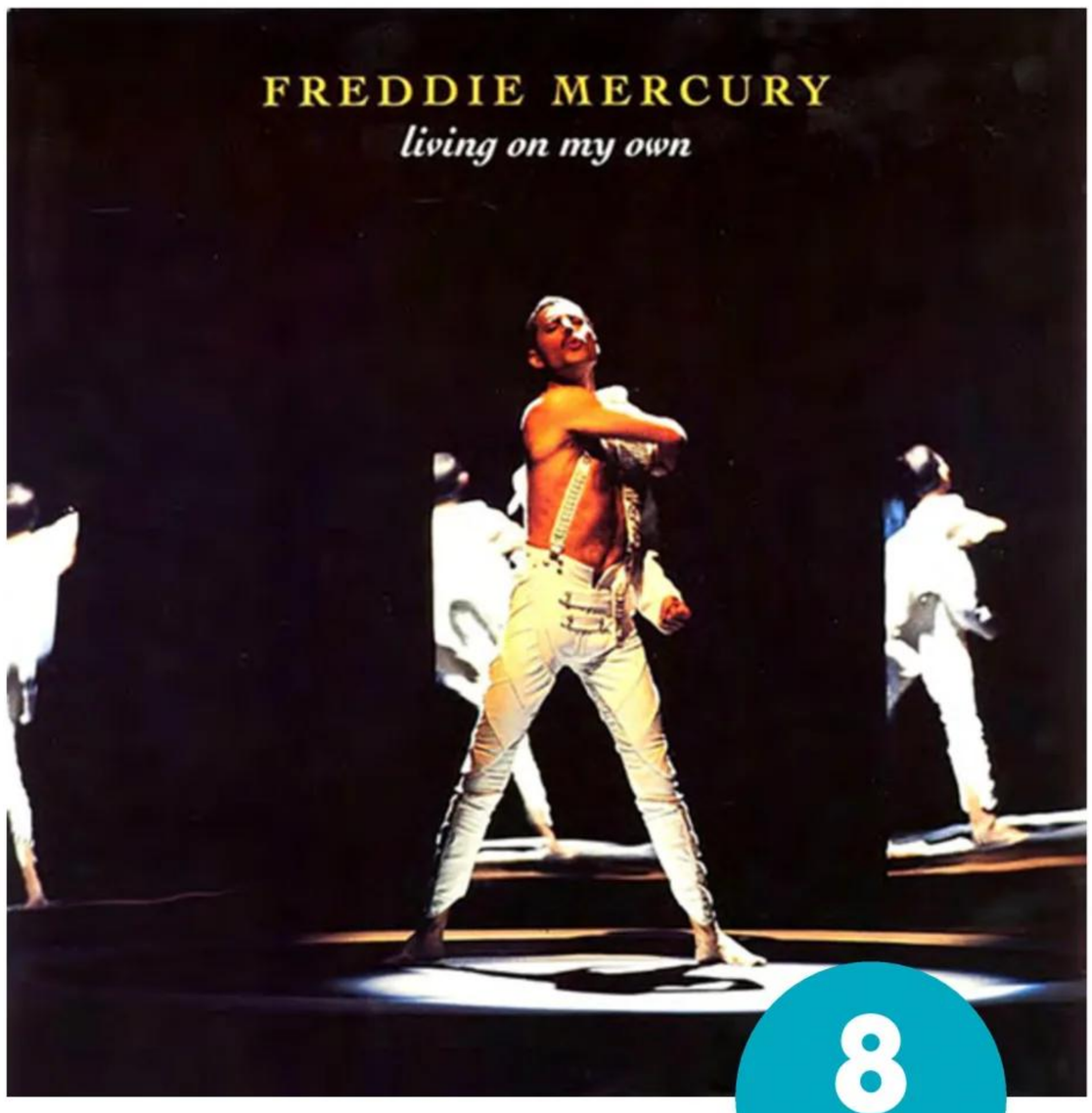


29 YEARS

19 YEARS

THE HOLLIES *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*

Originally recorded by Kelly Gordon in 1969, the song became a worldwide hit for The Hollies later that year, when it reached No. 3 on the UK charts and also went Top 10 Stateside. Elton John, who was working as a session musician at the time, played the piano on the song. However, it was almost two decades later that the track reached a new peak, topping the Singles Chart when it was re-released in August 1988 following its use in a TV advertisement for Miller Lite beer.



8 YEARS

FREDDIE MERCURY *Living On My Own*

Originally included on his first solo album, 'Mr. Bad Guy' (1985), *Living On My Own* was first released as a single in September 1985, when it peaked at No. 50 on the Singles Chart. Eight years later, in 1993 - almost two years after Mercury's death - the No More Brothers Mix of *Living On My Own* was released and launched the song, which celebrates the late Queen frontman's long standing admiration for Greta Garbo, to the No. 1 spot, becoming his first solo chart-topper.

5 YEARS

JOHN LENNON *Imagine*

The opening song from his 1971 album of the same name, the former Beatle's rallying call to imagine a world of peace, without materialism, borders separating nations and religion was first released as a UK single in 1975 to promote the compilation 'Shaved Fish' and peaked at No. 6 that year. It later topped the chart following Lennon's murder in 1980 and has sold more than 1.7 million copies in the UK alone, with more than 200 artists having performed or covered the song.

QUICK READ

HEY DJ!

Reflecting on six decades of success while looking to the future - with new music and a tour in the works - **Cher** proved herself the ultimate icon during a recent trip to London!

Sixty years into her career, Cher is still landing hit records - and breaking them - at every turn.

For an artist who's spent decades defying genre boundaries - from her early '60s pop rock with Sonny Bono, to folk-influenced early solo efforts, '70s disco gems, stadium-sized rock anthems and all-out bangers - it's no surprise that the Goddess Of Pop has managed to sustain her success for so long.

But her latest holiday LP - Cher's 27th overall - is her first in five years and her first to feature original material since 2013's 'Closer To The Truth'. What compelled the pop legend to return to the studio for her latest set? "Well, the record company," she laughs during an 'in conversation' event in London. "Everybody's wanted me to make one forever but I just didn't want to. I really didn't feel it."

Her qualms surrounding the project boiled down to song choices; keen to veer away from the holiday standards that usually litter such albums, Cher hadn't even set about gathering tracks to record when she was sent the club-friendly *DJ Play A Christmas Song* by "a girl that I've known since she was four years old".

That girl is songwriter Sarah Hudson, whose dad, Mark Hudson, and uncle, Brett Hudson, Cher co-wrote *My Song (Too Far Gone)* with for her 1979 album, 'Take Me Home'. "We did it and we loved it so I thought, 'OK, we'll just start getting songs that we like and we won't care if they match or anything like that'. And they don't match, but they go quite well together..."

With the record, Cher returned to the global charts and its lead single topped the US Billboard Dance/ Electronic Digital Song Sales and Adult Contemporary countdowns, making her the only female artist to have a No. 1 song on any Billboard chart in the past seven consecutive decades.

The response has her fired up for more. "I haven't made anything for a long time and Alexander [Edwards, boyfriend] said to me when we first met, 'Why aren't you singing?' and I said, 'I don't know'," she admits. "I just wasn't inspired, but then he brought me some songs that are really great, that I'm gonna do on the next album that I'm about to do. I figure I'm in the groove so I might as well do it, because I really forgot how much I like singing - you forget!"

> **I DON'T HAVE ANY BUSINESS WITH AI, BECAUSE I'VE WORKED MY WHOLE LIFE TO BE WHO I AM AND I DON'T WANT SOME MACHINE DOING ME!**

Over the past decade, Cher toured the US with her 'Dressed To Kill' show in 2014 before taking up residency in Las Vegas from 2017 with 'Classic Cher'. On the back of her appearance in 'Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again' the following year, she recorded the ABBA covers collection 'Dancing Queen' (2018) and embarked upon her 'Here We Go Again Tour', which ran through to the start of 2020.

The downtime that followed got her out of the swing of performing, but the effect of her most recent success is much like that of landing *Believe* after the commercial disappointment of 'It's A Man's World' (1995). "Well, I'd just been dropped by my record company and my management so we came over here, my assistant and her sister," she remembers of the situation prior to recording the former album. "Rob Dickins, the head of Warner UK, called and said, 'I don't think you're washed up'. So we did one album and it wasn't very good, then he said, 'I want to do a disco album' - and I said, 'Well I don't want to'. So he said, 'OK Cher, I'll just send you songs and when you like a song, we'll hold onto it and we'll do it'."

The hits, of course, kept coming, but when it came to the creative process she admits that perfecting the track that would change the landscape of pop music forever wasn't plain sailing. "*Believe* was a mess," Cher laughs. "A bunch of people worked on it but it just never got there." There were a number of issues. First: "I have a feeling... a girl can be heartbroken over a guy for one verse, that's it, and they had her heartbroken for both verses. [So] I was sitting in the bathtub and I was thinking, *'I've had time to think it through, and maybe I'm too good for you'.* And then I didn't take writers [credit] on it. My assistant said, 'Cher, what's the matter?' and I went, 'Oh well, I just wanted to be good'. I could have been so much richer!"

Then there was the issue of the vocals. "The one fight I got into with my [producer, Mark Taylor] - because

PHOTO AN LE

Mark is the nicest person in the world - is I was singing it and the verse just kind of [meandered] along, and he kept saying, 'Cher, you've got to sing it better'. I said, 'If you want something better, get someone else'," she remembers. "So I left and then the next morning, I saw this boy, Roachford, on the breakfast show singing into a vocoder, and I called Mark and said, 'Can we use a vocoder?' He said, 'No, but I just got this thing called a pitch machine and I've been playing around with it. Give me a couple of hours then come in and see what you think.'"

Looking back, she admits Taylor was "afraid I wasn't going to like it", but that couldn't have been farther from the truth. "It was like, 'Oh my God, this is so cool, I've never heard anything like this'," she beams. "And the thing I loved the most about it was that, in the beginning, you couldn't tell it was me... and then we had to convince the record company that not knowing it was me was a great idea!"

It was a bold move that introduced Cher to a new generation of fans and, at the time, made her the oldest female artist to top the UK Singles Chart at 52, but taking such control over her career wasn't always easy. "The thing I like the most about today for women is that when I was young, you were just told to sing and when you were finished you were told to go and sit down," reflects the *Strong Enough* hitmaker. "They didn't ask you what you wanted to sing, they told you what you were gonna sing, so it was a whole different business. But as I got older, I got tougher. You have to do what your heart tells you to do..."

So, what *is* Cher's heart telling her right now? Well, she's already got more music on the horizon and is keen to follow-up the collaborations on her new LP (Cyndi Lauper, Stevie Wonder and Michael Bublé all feature) by duetting with Elton John: "I've known Elton since he first got to America and we've been friends ever since, so I'd like to sing with him because I love his voice."

Cher's also planning to return to the road for a new tour (more than 20 years after her first 'Farewell Tour' began) and when it comes to the future of her stage show, she'd "love" to explore a virtual concept like ABBA's 'Voyage' residency - as long as it's authentic.

"I don't want AI. I don't have any business with AI, because I've worked my whole life to be who I am and I don't want some machine doing me," she insists. "Somebody did me doing a Madonna song, but the AI has got to go back to school!" **RP**

● ***Cher's latest album, 'Christmas', is out now on Warner.***

V E N U S

Zara Larsson

T O U R

16.02.24	MANCHESTER	ACADEMY
17.02.24	GLASGOW	O2 ACADEMY
18.02.24	BIRMINGHAM	O2 ACADEMY
21.02.24	LONDON	ROUNDHOUSE

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Zara Larsson

LIVE NATION ENTERTAINMENT

IN THE MIX

Having written mega-hits for the biggest names in pop, songwriter and producer **Toby Gad** is revisiting his catalogue for an all-new project.

He's responsible for some of the biggest hits of the 21st century, but only now is Toby Gad stepping to the fore as an artist.

"I was a judge on 'German Idol' two years ago and through that I kind of made myself a name in Germany and started writing with Bakermat," he shares of the collaboration that delivered the hit single, *Can't Bring Me Down* feat. Nicole Bus. "We felt it made sense to add my name as an artist onto that release, which was the first time that I actually saw my artist name on a record."

That track was built squarely with the dance floor in mind, but for his latest project, 'Piano Diaries - Volume One', Gad is stripping-back and reimagining some of his best-known material with new vocalists who uncover different dimensions to the material.

"I have a moment in my life now where I can look back at the songs I've written and enjoy them," he smiles. "They're far enough away - like *Big Girls Don't Cry*, I wrote that 20 years ago with Fergie - but when I hear them on the radio, I feel like there are things I would like to do differently. And that was the motivation for 'Piano Diaries'."

That song has been released as a single with actress and singer Victoria Justice - star of the hit Nickelodeon TV series, 'Victorious' - on vocals, while rising star Camylio delivers an impassioned rendition of *Skyscraper*.

Songs from the project will drop throughout 2024 and along with the piano version, each will be accompanied by a series of remixes that have allowed Gad to tap into a different realm of his creativity.

His strive for exploration is no doubt inherited; born into a musical family in Munich, Germany, his parents were established figures in the local music scene with their group, The Jazz Kids. "Blues and jazz is a brilliant foundation for pop and every now and then pop finds its way back to blues and jazz," Gad shares, "so it was definitely a great upbringing, to have started with that kind of music."

At seven years old, he and his brother, Jens, formed their own band, the Gad Rollers, and played their original songs during intermissions at their parents' gigs, with their refined songwriting skills rewarding them a decade later when producer Frank Farian was looking for songs for his new act, Milli Vanilli.

"He'd just had this hit, *Girl You Know It's True*, with two dancers that he found in a discotheque, which for the fun of it they called Milli Vanilli without thinking much of it, and it became massive," he chuckles. "So they had to do an album and we had three songs he liked, so he recorded them and weeks later the album was No. 1 in Europe. That was an insane experience!"

It would be a decade before he moved to the US, originally settling in New York in 2000 where, over the course of nine years, he enjoyed a number of breaks, working with everyone from The Veronicas (*Untouched*) to Beyoncé (*If I Were A Boy*). On the latter, he recalls: "I wrote the song with BC Jean to try and get her a record deal, but nobody wanted to do that. A little later, I had the chance to go in the studio with Beyoncé and when I played her the song, she stood up and said, 'Toby, I want to record this right now'. An hour and a half later, we had *If I Were A Boy*."

In 2009, he relocated to the West Coast and from Los Angeles continued to work with the biggest names in pop, penning mega-hits like *All Of Me* for John Legend and *Don't Hold Your Breath* for Nicole Scherzinger, and collaborating with Madonna on much of her 13th album, 'Rebel Heart' (2015).

"At first, she was really intimidating, Madonna-style, but a few days later she was in the vocal booth and I had a feeling she could do the vocal way better if she tried harder," he laughs. "So I said, 'Please, try it again, you can do this better', and she goes, 'Fuck you, Toby, I'm not doing it again!' I was like, 'Fuck you, Madonna', so we had a little fight, and there was this rumour going around that if Madonna doesn't like you, she leaves the room and the assistant comes in and tells you to leave. But somehow we bonded over this and I stayed for the next five weeks!"

There is, however, still one big act he's keen to work with. "I would love to work with P!nk," he beams. "If she sees this, please, it's time for us to write a song together!" **RP**

● ***'Piano Diaries - Volume One' is out later this year.***

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO **PHOTO** OSWALDO CEPEDA

QUICK READ

FRIEND OR FOE

As bassist with Adam Ant, **Chris Constantinou** toured the world – an experience he revisits while celebrating his life in music.

Bassist Chris Constantinou got his start with school and garage bands supporting artists such as King Crimson, Snafu and Sassafras, before joining one of the biggest stars of the 1980s: Adam Ant.

As a member of his solo band, the musician played on many of his classic hits and was a mainstay of his live set-up, performing for millions of fans worldwide.

Looking back, he opens up on more than four decades in music, from his early years at art school to his whirlwind ride with the Dandy Highwayman himself.

What were your first steps in music?

I started playing gigs straight after school. I was playing in bands since I was 14 and then, by the time I left, I went to art school. They said, 'People make a choice between music and art' - because I was playing gigs, coming back early in the morning and not able to do the artwork.

They weren't nasty about it. They just said, 'What do you want to do?' And I said, 'I want to do both.' I just thought, 'Well, I'm earning money from it.' So I went with the music and then I got a gig in this band in Germany. They were from England, but they were doing the American bases, so I joined this country band.

I was playing with all these old men - they were about 28 or something - and I'm thinking, 'Oh my God, I'm in an old man's band!' I was playing every night to learn the ropes, playing the Irish gigs. It was a time when there were a lot of punk bands. Like, The Pogues were playing the Irish pubs. And so I was playing in a lot of those Irish places.

I've done a lot of really bad places. Turning up and just saying, 'Yeah, I can play jazz,' when I've never done a jazz bass in my life. These guys are counting me in and I'm saying, 'OK, what key is it in?' and they say, 'That's for you to guess.' The guys would turn around after the first number and say, 'You haven't played jazz before.' But by the end of the gig, he'd say, 'Alright, you're in - but you've got to learn some stuff.'

So right time, right place - but also being prepared to make a fool of yourself!

You seem to have a knack for being in the right place at the right time...

I guess there's been a bit of luck, like walking up Carnaby Street and then walking into Trax Records. There was that guy, Charlie, from the record company that was cleaning up the offices and getting all the multi-tracks sorted out, and I went in there with my demo and signed with Miles Copeland.

I think it's just sort of seizing the opportunity, just being in the right place at the right time and not being scared to just walk in and say, 'Hello'.

You'd established yourself as a player by the time you joined Adam Ant, but he already had a legacy of his own. How did you approach that challenge?

I didn't see it as a pressure. Adam and Marco [Pirroni, guitarist] were so tight as a unit, and they were always having these secret meetings with the management. So it was easy to get paranoid.

It was more managing your mind and thinking, 'That's the way they are. They're not talking, they're not saying you're shit and they're gonna sack you,' that sort of thing. I had to deal with insecurities like that, because I thought it was too good to be true.

Getting a job like that and then feeling a little bit insecure, not musically, but you really don't want to screw it up... And I didn't think it would be through music or anything, it was just society and politics.

Adam and the Ants had a couple of bass players, but he chose you specifically for his solo band.

Gary Tibbs was obviously a really good player. And there was Andy Warren. The guy from Bow Wow Wow [Leigh Gorman]. And then there was me.

I was there the longest. The good thing is I felt Adam really liked me, so I felt very secure about that. Marco was just sort of himself - he didn't really give a shit about anything. But you knew where you stood with him.

At that point, Adam was totally different to how I remember him when I last saw him. When I last saw him, he was so together, so organised, completely fit - he didn't smoke, didn't drink.

When you saw him a while back, Adam's manager mentioned touring with him again. Did anything ever come of that conversation?

What happened was, I saw Adam and we were having a chat. Adam left and his manager came up and said, 'Oh, Adam wants to know if you would want to tour with him again?'

I said, 'Yeah, sure' and he said, 'Well, these would be the terms.' I said, 'Well, let's see how it goes,' and that was the last time I heard about it.

I've never had anything bad between me and Adam, so I wouldn't have thought there'd be any issues.

If there was a tour that happened and he said, 'Oh, do you want to do a 'Vive Le Rock' Tour,' for instance, I'd say, 'Yeah, I'd love to.' Because there'd be a start and finish to it, and it's not like being in a

“I WOULD CLASSIFY ADAM ANT IN THE SAME SORT OF LEAGUE AS PEOPLE LIKE JIMI HENDRIX”

band. It's just, 'This is the tour, these are the dates,' and that's the end of it.

Do you think Adam gets the recognition he deserves as a musician and performer?

Being on the same stage as Adam is like... He's the best performer I've ever been on stage with. And I've been on stage with a lot of really good performers.

I would classify him in the same sort of league as people like [Jimi] Hendrix. Those one-off sort of people that you get every now and then.

If you listen to some of his early stuff... It's really quite weird, but really good. I remember talking to him about it, because I heard he didn't like [debut Adam and the Ants album] 'Dirk Wears White Sox' (1979], and I said it's my favourite album that he'd done so far.

He said, 'Well, it didn't really reach the status of what I wanted it to be. I wanted it to be really successful and it wasn't.' I said, 'But it's become a cult record, and he said, 'Oh, that's just another word for loser.'

I remember him really clearly saying, 'Cult is just loser.'

So he made a conscious decision to be more commercial after that?

I think the thing was Malcolm McClaren, when he came in, and the whole thing with the two drummers...

And the 'Strip' (1983) album with Phil Collins...

Yeah, that was a weird one. I'm kind of glad I didn't do that. I was at my mum's and it was Christmas. I got a phone call and they said, 'Oh, do you want to come to Sweden and make this album?' I said, 'I'm at my mum's, it's Christmas...'

It was so not my style normally, because I'd normally just go, but it just didn't feel right. When I listened to the album, I was pleased [I didn't go].

I can't remember if there's one track on it I like or not... Actually, *Navel To Neck* I like, because we played it at the Montreux Pop Festival.

There were some good beats on it, and some good sounds, but it's an album that I remember, when we were playing it live, is terrible to play. Like, honestly, I was thinking, 'This is so bad to play live.'

What were your favourite live moments?

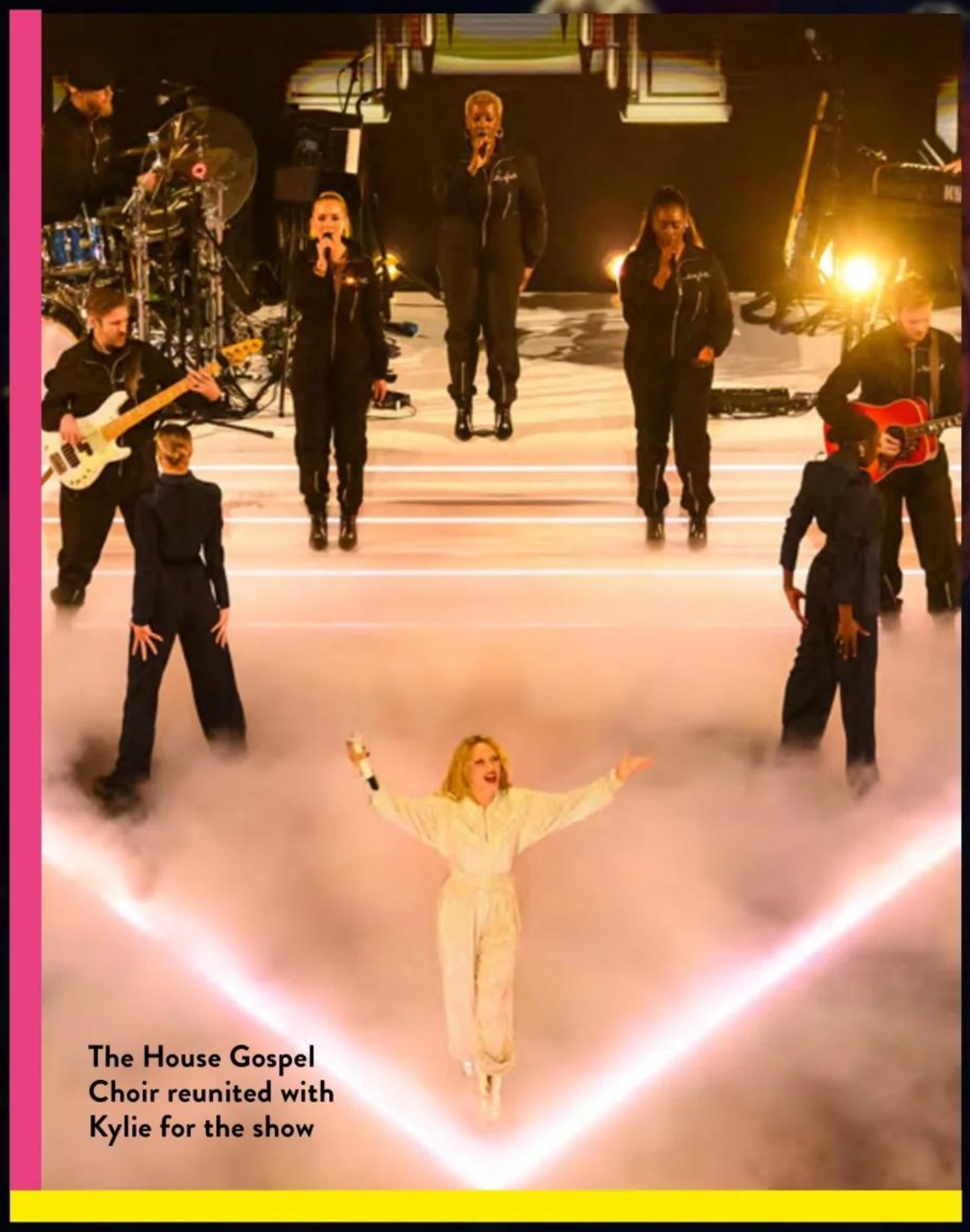
Some of the best stuff to play live is the B-sides, like *Fall In* and *B-Side Baby* and *Fat Fun* - I used to love playing all that stuff. It felt really fun and natural, really in your face.

It felt the same as when we were recording with Tony Visconti, because we made the album then said, 'Let's record some B-sides' and they just seemed to work out really easily. The 'Vive Le Rock' (1985) album as well, that just seemed to work.

There's some tracks on there we didn't play live, but most of those you can play live and I think it's just one of those things that, for me, because I come from a sort of roots background, playing blues and stuff like that, anything that was punky or rootsy, I like.

But anything that didn't feel it had a groove or didn't feel natural, I didn't like playing, I guess... **RP**

PHOTO TINA KORHONEN



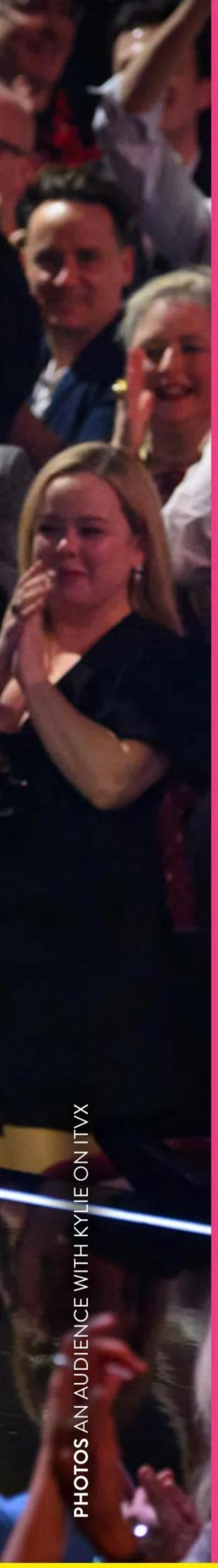
The House Gospel Choir reunited with Kylie for the show

COME INTO MY WORLD

Fresh from the Las Vegas stage, revisit **Kylie Minogue**'s dazzling takeover of London's Royal Albert Hall for 'An Audience With Kylie' on ITVX.

A sultry *I Should Be So Lucky* reunited the singer with Pete Waterman

Global hit *Padam Padam* was a surefire highlight from the spectacle



PHOTOS AN AUDIENCE WITH KYLIE ON ITVX

'Call me Kylie-e-e'

SETLIST

1. *Tension*

2. *Spinning Around*

3. *All the Lovers*

(with House Gospel Choir)

4. *Hold On To Now*

(with House Gospel Choir)

5. *I Should Be So Lucky*

(Abbey Road version on piano)

6. *Come Into My World*

7. *The Loco-Motion*

8. *Padam Padam*

9. *Can't Get You Out Of My Head*

The stars came out to see the pop icon in west London

The nine-song set spanned her '88 debut through to 'Tension'

Go West

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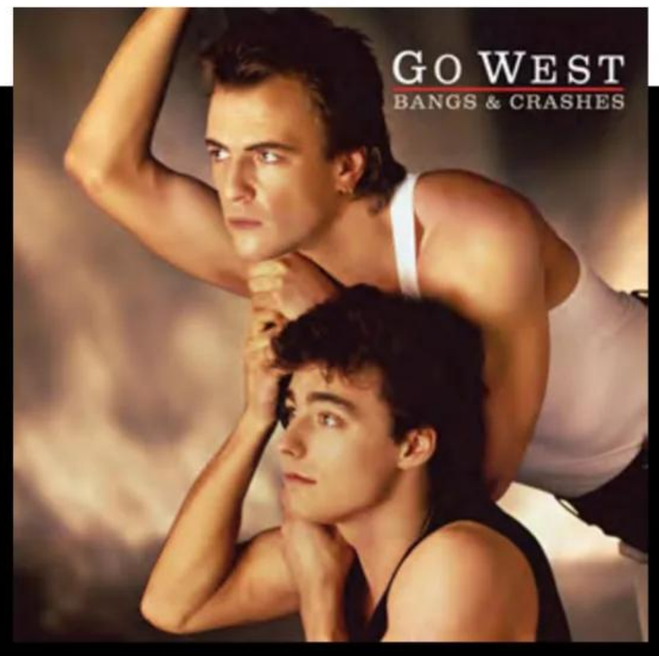

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CATALOGUE

FLASHBACK

PAUL COURT OF THE PRIMITIVES

Fifteen years after they first reformed, The Primitives' **Paul Court** looks back on the band's '80s heyday ahead of a fresh run of shows!

"When we started again in 2009, we thought we'd do a maximum of about four shows - and it just kept going!" laughs Paul Court of The Primitives' return to the stage after 17 years away.

With no grand plans and spurred on by the untimely death of bassist Steve Dullaghan, it was an understated return; they played their first gig at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in their hometown of Coventry, after which they embarked on a UK tour, which included a stop at London's Scala. "That was pretty crazy - there was a lot of middle-aged moshing going on," he quips.

The indie-pop outfit formed in the summer of 1984 and released a run of tracks, such as *Thru The Flowers* and *Really Stupid*, on their own Lazy Records imprint. In late 1987, they signed the label over to RCA, which continued to release the band's material and soon saw them land international success with their global smash hit, *Crash*, which peaked at No. 5 in the UK and paved the way for the group's debut studio album, 'Lovely' (1988).

Also featuring the singles *Stop Killing Me*, *Thru The Flowers* and *Out Of Reach*, it's been revived several times live in its entirety by the group - fronted by vocalist Tracy Tracy with drummer Tig Williams - with the band set to take the show Down Under this year.

"We're gonna play that debut album from start to finish and, of course, when we do that we have to play *Crash* right at the start because it's the first song on the album," Paul laughs. "So that's your insurance gone - usually we'd keep that one in our back pocket until the end of the set!"

Follow-ups 'Pure' (1989) and 'Galore' (1992) may not have matched the heights of the group's initial outing, but the singles *Way Behind Me* and *Sick of It* both entered the UK Top 40 and they, along with *Secrets*, also went Top 20 on the US Alternative chart.

"It was a very busy time and we just got swept along by it all," Paul reflects of The Primitives' busiest period. "When I look back on it now, there were so many things going on that I kind of wish I'd stepped back and taken stock of it all. Because in situations like that, you're never paying attention quite the way you want to..."

Three years after their first comeback shows, the group entered the studio to record 'Echoes And Rhymes' (2012) - their first album in 21 years, collecting cover versions of 1960s "obscurities" from acts such as Gordon Lightfoot, Jackie DeShannon and Shocking Blue, which was followed by their fifth album, 'Spin-O-Rama' (2014), featuring original material.

Their most recent works reunited the band with original producer, Paul Sampson, with whom they also recorded the EPs 'Never Kill A Secret' (2011) and 'New Thrills' (2017), along with various standalone singles. But is there more new music to come? "There's always new songs coming along. I don't know that we'll do an album again, but we enjoy doing the odd thing here and there," he says, admitting that with new technology, it's easier than ever to set up and record whenever and wherever they like. "The last time we did stuff, we did it at people's houses - except for the drums, which we recorded in a snooker hall! But it's all portable now, so the studio can be anywhere nowadays. The place we used to record closed down and now it's student flats!"

This month, the band will return to the stage in support of former Stranglers star Hugh Cornwell for a run of UK dates, which came about thanks to both acts sharing the same live agent, who put them in touch and orchestrated their latest move. Could they share the stage for a one-off collaboration during the shows? Paul laughs: "I don't know! We played a festival with him a couple of years back... maybe I should learn *Peaches*!" **RP**

● ***The Primitives will join Hugh Cornwell as very special guests for a UK tour, with eight shows between January 17 and January 27.***

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

QUICK READ

HEY THERE, WILD THINGS!

Set to return with their first album in seven years, **Starsailor's James Walsh** opens up on the group's latest outing!

Starsailor's new album, 'Where The Wild Things Grow', is their first in seven years - since their fifth UK Top 30 LP, 'All This Life' (2017) - but its origins go hand-in-hand with their debut, 'Love Is Here' (2001), for which they recently embarked on a 20th anniversary tour.

Having peaked at No. 2 upon its release and gone on to shift over one million copies, the record affiliated the band with the New Acoustic Movement - alongside the likes of Coldplay and Travis - and while performing it in full across 14 shows back in 2022, they took the opportunity to test out the early ideas that would form their latest project.

It was second single, *Heavyweight*, that stood out in the set - a track that, according to vocalist and songwriter James Walsh, taps into the band's strive for longevity: "This isn't a fleeting thing, and we're in it for the long run, the ups and downs, and it will feel heavy sometimes."

Across the record, produced by Rick McNamara, they touch on a multitude of themes; *Dead On The Money* is "a song about being flat broke but full of hope, although I like the fact it means exactly right too. Like knowing deep down you're on the right track even though recovery is slow," says Walsh, while the folk-tinged *Flowers* was inspired by a documentary about a flower seller in Aleppo who "just kept setting up his stall, despite the bombs going off around him, dedicated to providing a tiny haven of beauty during such a devastating time".

> **IN SPITE OF ALL THAT WE ACHIEVED BACK IN THE DAY, THE FEELING OF BEING THE UNDERDOG HAS NEVER QUITE LEFT ME**

Tapping into various transatlantic influences, from The Eagles (*Enough (I Should Be Home By Now)*) to Crosby Stills and Nash (*After The Rain*), alongside themes of love and hope, it makes for a collection that's instantly classic while quintessentially Starsailor. On *Hard Love*, Walsh muses on the simplicity of single life, whilst *Hanging In The Balance* is about the delicate time in "the early stages of a relationship when it's starting to get real and you're on the precipice between it becoming something life-changing or you both going your separate ways."

Leading the record is its sublime title track, which brings to the fore a sense of mystery and unease, reminiscent of early Bowie and Pink Floyd recordings. "I wrote it in my old flat at night," recalls Walsh. "I could hear the pipes creaking. I was thinking of Maurice Sendak and Stanley Donwood's Radiohead art.

"There's an early Ed Harcourt song called *Beneath The Heart Of Darkness* that's an influence too. The brooding otherworldly darkness."

That feeling of the unknown is innate to the group; formed in and around Wigan at the start of the millennium and featuring Walsh (guitar, vocals), James Stelfox (bass), Barry Westhead (keyboards) and Ben Byrne (drums), the band impacted globally with their debut album, produced by Steve Osborne and recorded at Rockfield Studios, which delivered the UK Top 20 hits *Fever*, *Good*

Starsailor (l-r): Barry Westhead, Ben Byrne, James Walsh, James Stelfox

Souls and *Alcoholic*.

For their second album, 'Silence Is Easy' (2003), they teamed up with legendary songwriter and producer, Phil Spector, for what ended up being his final production work before his conviction of murder in 2009 and his death in 2021.

The collaboration came about following Spector's daughter, Nicole, attending one of the band's American concerts in the winter of 2002, but it was an uneasy alliance and after an aborted stint with the musician at Abbey Road, the band ended up co-producing the rest of the album with Danton Supple and John Leckie, with only two songs from the initial sessions - including the UK Top 10 title song - making it onto the record.

"Working with him was a tale of two halves," he reflects. "The first sessions we did were great, and we got *Silence Is Easy* and *White Dove* out of them which still stand up. When we reconvened, it became more difficult to work with him. It was a stressful time for the band because we really wanted it to work at the time given the pressure on the second album and the hype around a Spector-produced album."

The singer adds: "I feel uneasy revisiting that chapter given the tragic events. It was a huge honour to work with him at the time but it feels different now."

Two years later, Starsailor's third album, 'On The Outside' (2005), arrived; produced by Rob Schnapf in Los Angeles, it spawned three singles – *In The Crossfire*, *This Time* and *Keep Us Together* – and led to some of the band's biggest live performances, including shows at Hyde Park Calling and V Festival in 2006, and several dates supporting The Rolling Stones in Europe.

The band's fourth album, 'All The Plans', later materialised in 2009, described by Walsh at the time as "the perfect companion to 'Love Is Here'", featuring Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood on the title track and receiving widespread acclaim. It led to a hiatus, punctuated by 'Good Souls: The Greatest Hits' in 2015, after which their fifth album, similarly produced by Embrace guitarist McNamara, arrived in 2017.

Now on the verge of releasing its follow-up, Walsh admits that, more than two decades in, he still feels there's plenty to prove. "In spite of all that we achieved back in the day, the feeling of being the underdog has never quite left me," concludes the musician.

"I've changed a lot as a person since the early days of Starsailor. I feel much more grounded and have a better perspective on things." **RP**

● ***'Where The Wild Things Grow' is out March 22 on Townsend.***

PHOTO ANDY EARL

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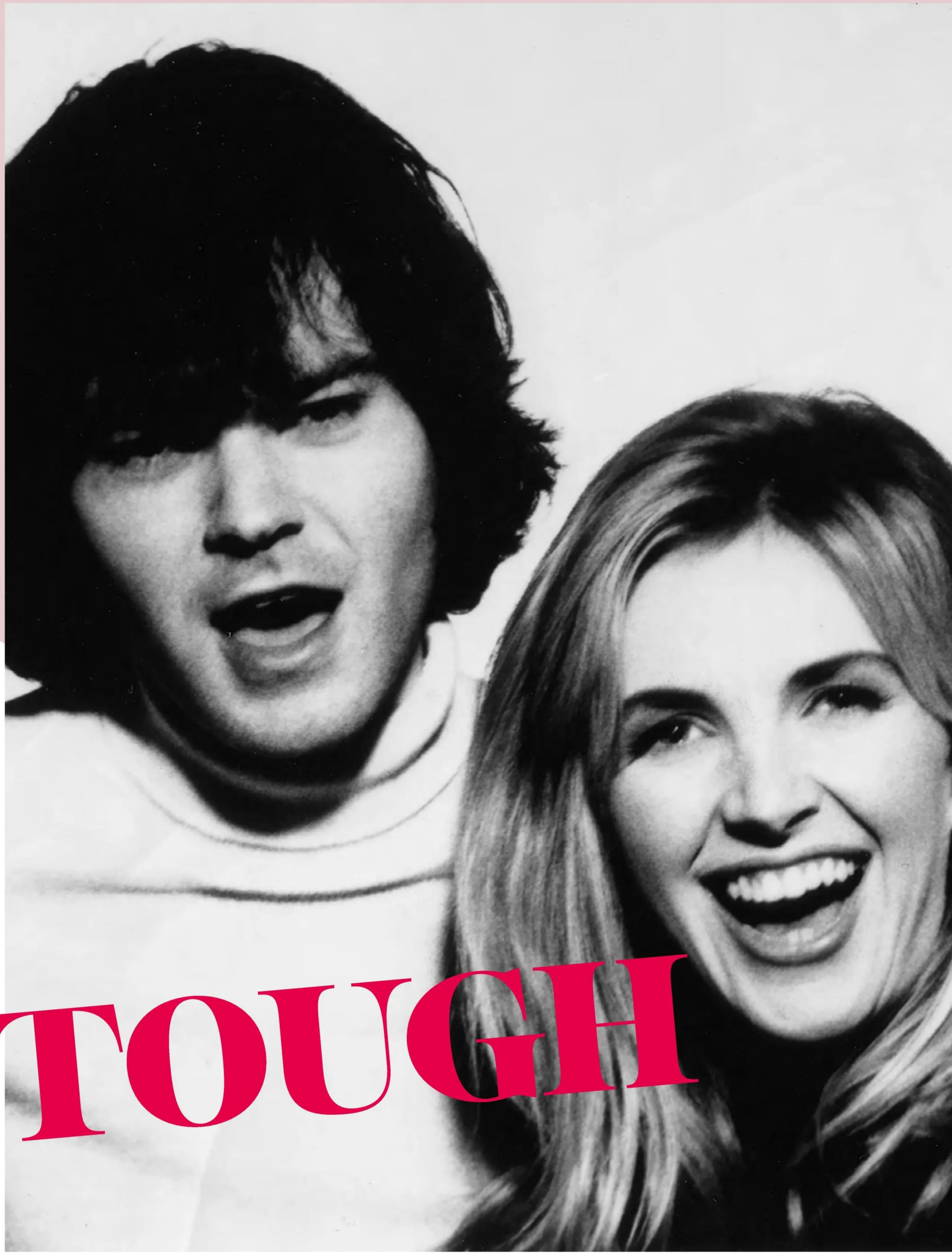
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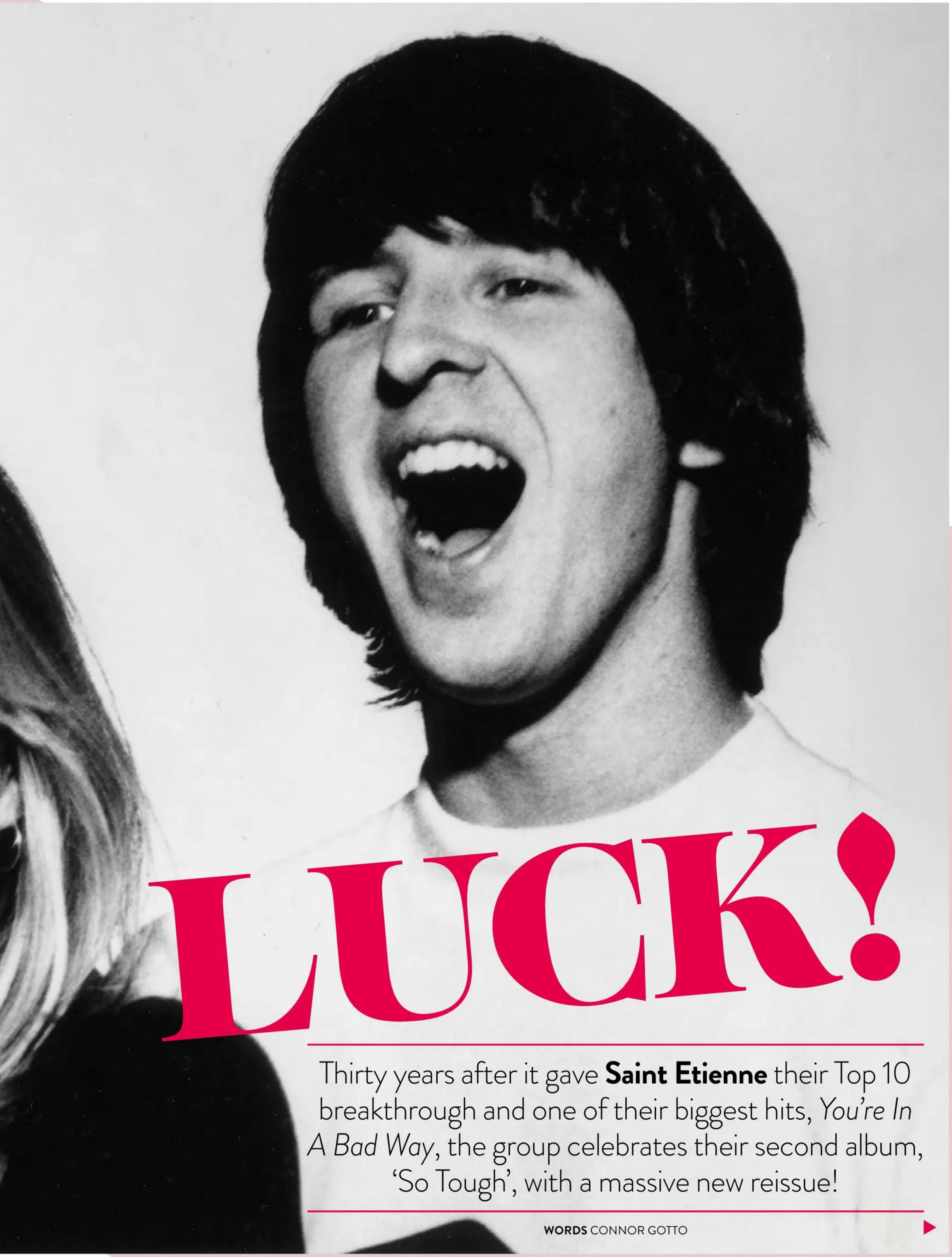


LUCK!

Thirty years after it gave **Saint Etienne** their Top 10 breakthrough and one of their biggest hits, *You're In A Bad Way*, the group celebrates their second album, 'So Tough', with a massive new reissue!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

The dreaded second album syndrome is a niggling threat for any pop act, presenting a pivotal make or break moment for even the most promising rising stars. But for Saint Etienne, who built songs around samples and traded off dance floor tracks with heartbreaking ballads, commerciality was always secondary in an enduring quest to realise their unique vision.

Centred on the duo of Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs and initially designed as a project with revolving vocalists, they soon found a musical equal in singer Sarah Cracknell, who made her single debut with the band on *Nothing Can Stop Us Now*, from their 1991 debut, 'Foxbase Alpha', and by the time it came to recording its follow-up she had joined the outfit as a full-time member.

Leaning into various influences with tracks bridged by samples from the band's favourite films and personal heroes, it saw Saint Etienne reach a new peak of creativity and, in doing so, ascend to new levels of success.

PAPER

"We were recording at Ian Catt's studio, where we'd done everything to that point - we'd never recorded anywhere else, so it was kind of sacred to us," recalls Bob Stanley of the band's early sessions which, after the release of their first LP, saw them briefly rebrand as Cola Boy for the UK Top 10 hit *7 Ways To Love* (the highest-charting single of their career, no less), and the Saint Etienne double A-side, *Join Our Club / People Get Real*.

However, there was a hitch. "There was a silent partner in the business, who decided that he wanted out of it, so Ian had to get rid of 50 per cent of his stuff, which meant the studio basically disappeared," Bob recalls. "We suddenly had to work out what we're gonna do without a studio and start from scratch."

Eventually, Ian relocated to a new premises by Crystal Palace football ground. "It was fine; there was an Alsatian there called Diesel and the whole place stank of dogs, but apart from that it was great," Bob laughs. "The place was run by old hippies who all had long hair and looked like they were in Hawkwind. But that's how we recorded 'So Tough - it was all quite experimental. In fact one of them - his name was actually Ranald Macdonald - ended up playing flute on *Mario's Cafe*, so it was quite useful to have them around."

It's an openness that saw the group develop 'So Tough' into one of their most ambitious projects with a "magpie-like" approach, according to Pete, who along with the rest of the group and their engineer, reflects on the LP 30 years later in the liner notes to the new set. "We were still keen to carry on down the experimental road, but there was probably more of a pop focus," he adds. "We were more into writing songs and we definitely wanted to do something epic."

Bob offers: "We had a pretty solid idea of what we wanted to do with the album; 'Foxbase Alpha' sounds like a bit of a scrapbook of various ideas we'd had all the years we were growing up, but 'So Tough' was the first album where we could think it through from beginning to end. So it starts in a cafe close to home and then just spirals around the world to various countries, kind of like a travelogue. That was the loose concept, anyway."

> **We were still keen to carry on down the experimental road, but there was probably more of a pop focus**
>
> **PETE**

If the music moves around, the face of Saint Etienne stays the same across the album's tracklist, with Sarah now a permanent member of the group, owing in part to the logistics of taking a project with alternating vocalists on the road. "You can't go on tour with that many singers," she notes. "So at that point Bob and Pete settled on the fact that we were a band now and it was really good."

Having already worked together across their previous release, the trio knew they got along and their shared interests helped build up the soundscape of their first record as a unit.

"Pretty much all of my favourite albums have got some kind of unifying thing, like a theme or a sound, and at the time we were listening to a lot of dub, which is all over it," says Bob. "We got a Roland Chorus Echo or a Roland Space Echo - or maybe both - which was a lot of fun to play with. We'd got a lot more gear since the first album; we had a Prophet-5, which I think Ian's still got. I might call that in one day...

"But it wasn't like we sat down and thought about it being a concept album lyrically, because *No Rainbows For Me* doesn't fit in with anything, but sonically it definitely has that. I think once you've written a few songs, things become apparent and you stick to that theme."

Saint Etienne (l-r):
Sarah Cracknell,
Pete Wiggs, Bob Stanley

EVERLASTING

One of the distinctive features of 'So Tough' is the use of samples between the songs, which are lifted from Bob, Pete and Sarah's preferred films and famous inspirations.. Inspired by their favourite classic albums - such as 'The Who Sell Out' (1967) by The Who and 'Head' by The Monkees (1968) - as well as contemporary hip-hop LPs, the audio is taken from movies such as 'Peeping Tom', 'Billy Liar', 'The Picture Of Dorian Gray', 'Lord Of The Flies' and 'That'll Be The Day', as well as the TV series 'The Family' and the 1958 stereo demonstration album, 'A Journey Into Stereophonic Sound'.

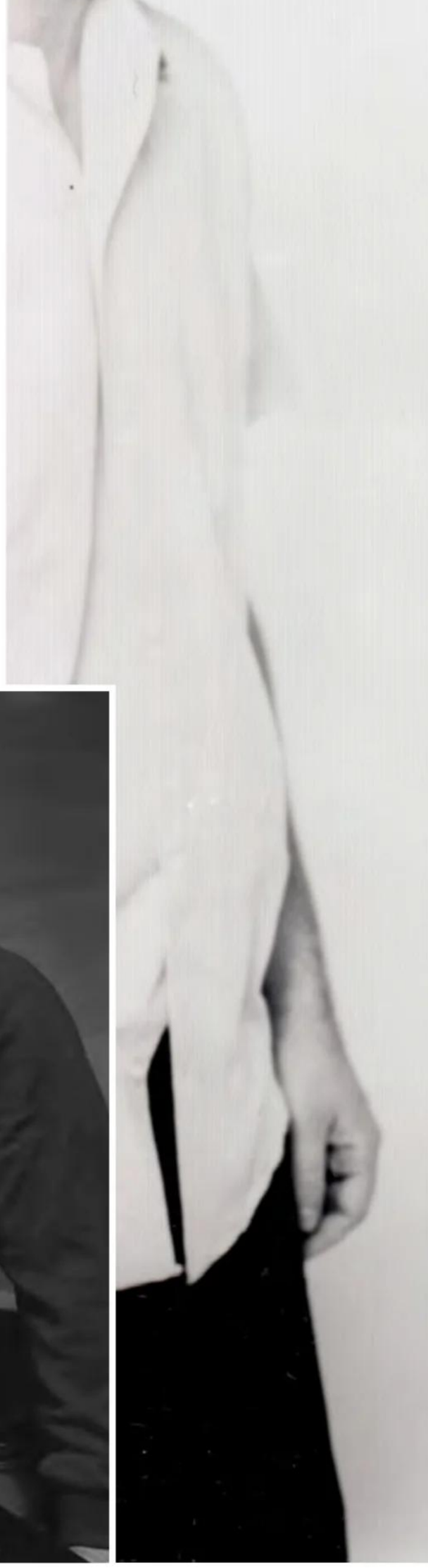
The band had intended to use a number of snippets from American films, but the cost of clearing them led to 'So Tough' featuring primarily British samples. "I don't think we cleared anything on 'Foxbase Alpha'," Bob laughs. "We did retrospectively, but nobody cared about samples at that point because hip-hop, incredibly, was still not a massive commercial force in America. But by the time 'So Tough' came about, people were asking silly money for any kind of sample and the sample clearance cost probably twice as much as the cost of recording the album. So we had to ditch any dialogue from American films because they wouldn't clear it and the album actually ended up sounding very British."

He adds: "We did clear a couple of things; Rush were very nice and let us use the sample from *The Spirit Of Radio*. They sent us a very nice letter, I remember, which was quite surreal and basically said, 'Of course you can use it - I don't know why you'd want to ruin your lovely song with our guitar playing, but there you go...'"

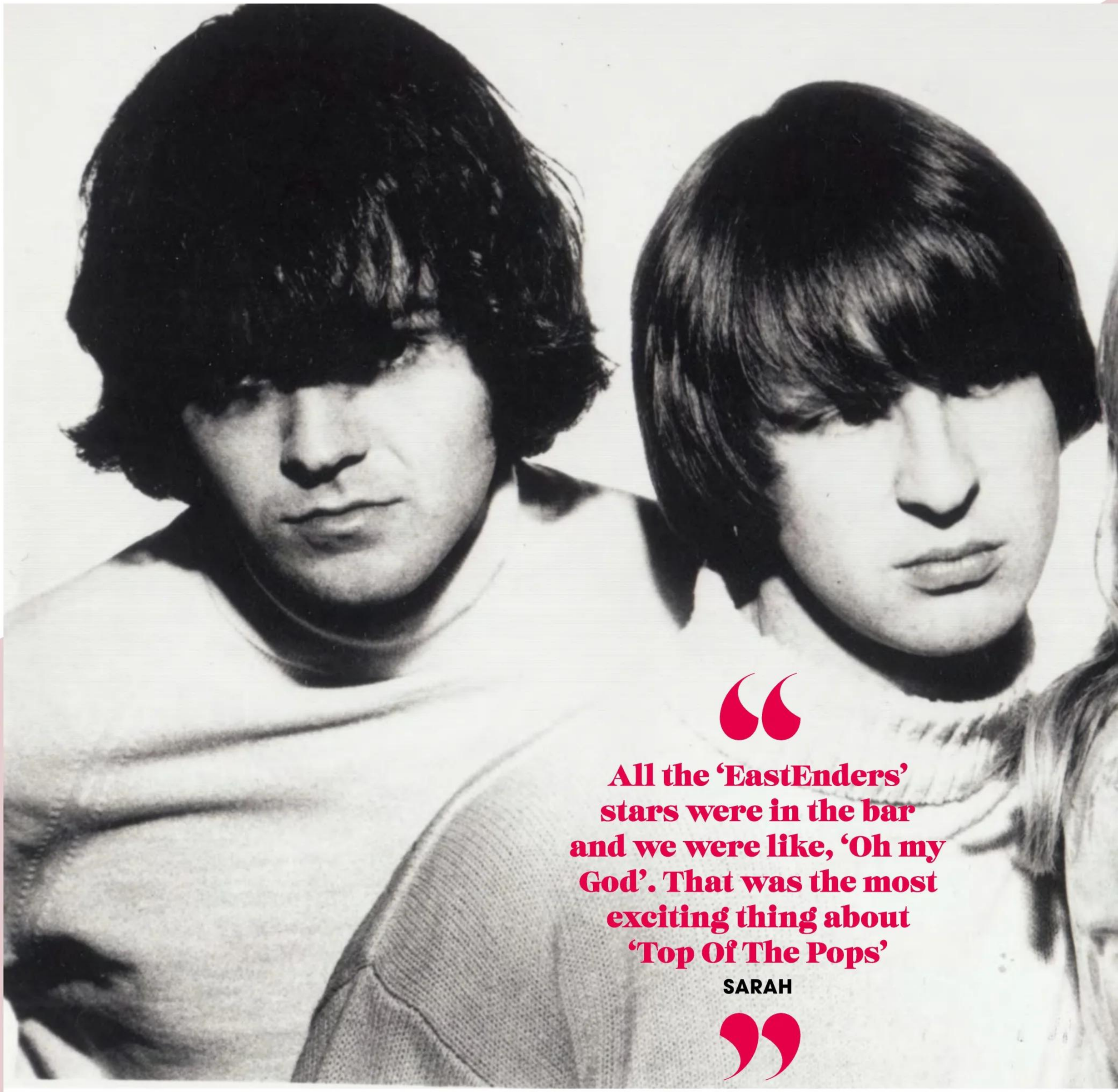
> **Once you've written a few songs, things become apparent and you stick to that theme**
>
> **BOB**

Featuring an image of Sarah aged six on the cover, taken by her father Derek, the LP was preceded by the lead single *Avenue*; an eight-minute electronica number with lengthy instrumental sequences, about a woman nostalgically remembering a love affair from her youth. It contains birdsong sampled from Pink Floyd's *Cirrus Minor* and was well received upon its release, with Pete recalling of writing the elaborate number: "We were sitting on the floor of the studio which was really grubby, getting sore knees, surrounded by all these bits of paper. This was our *MacArthur Park* moment."

Ian cites The Beach Boys' 'Pet Sounds' (1966) as a creative influence - "in as much as it was made in pieces and then cut together in the edit" - although it turns out the radio edit didn't quite make it out of the record company office and into the desired hands. "I remember talking



> **I'd forgotten how it flows and all the different samples on it. I thought, 'That sounds pretty good actually'**
>
> **PETE**



> **All the 'EastEnders' stars were in the bar and we were like, 'Oh my God'. That was the most exciting thing about 'Top Of The Pops'**
>
> **SARAH**

to the radio plugger afterwards and saying, 'It's a shame we didn't get any airplay', and she went, 'Yeah, if there would have been a radio edit it would have been helpful' - and at Creation there was a box of these bloody CDs, sat in the corner, that someone had forgotten to give to her," sighs Bob. "So obviously Radio 1 wasn't going to play an eight-minute song."

That track peaked at No. 40 but its follow-up, *You're In A Bad Way*, gave Saint Etienne their biggest success yet, entering the Top 20 at No. 12. Written as a throwback to 1960s pop music, it was only intended to be a B-side to *Everlasting* (which went unreleased until 2009), but the record company decided that it should be a single, for which it was remixed by Alan Tarney.

It's one of only a few tracks on the record with Sarah credited as a writer. "I think she wrote some of the lyrics on that, but it was a gradual process," Bob remembers. "Sarah had friends that she'd been writing with forever, so it was just the odd collaboration, but on the boxset there's a demo of us writing it on the hoof, with just an acoustic guitar and Sarah singing, and the words and the melody are quite different. That was quite a nice thing to find on an old cassette."

The success of the single led to the band's first appearance on 'Top Of The Pops', alongside acts including East 17 and 2 Unlimited. "All the EastEnders stars were in the bar and we were like, 'Oh my God'. That was the most exciting thing. And, also, I had a bit of a crush on Tony Mortimer," Sarah remembers.

PHOTOS JAMIE FRY

EVERYTHING FLOWS

The final single from 'So Tough', *Hobart Paving*, was issued as a double A-side with the band's cover of *Who Do You Think You Are*, originally released in 1974 by Jigsaw and a hit for Candlewick Green, which reached No. 23 on the charts. It coincided with their March tour, with Pulp as support, which Sarah recalls as being "quite hedonistic... but so brilliant" - a sentiment backed up by in violinist Russell Senior's autobiography, in which he distinctly recalls: "Wiggs was a party animal".

But listening back to the LP some 30 years later, the band remains pleased with the outcome. "It

surprised me in a way," Pete admits. "I'd forgotten how it flows and all the different samples on it. I thought, 'That sounds pretty good actually'."

"There's a demo of us writing *You're In A Bad Way* with just an acoustic guitar and Sarah singing. That was quite a nice thing to find!"

BOB

Bob counters: "It sounds much more peculiar than I thought it did. I'm pleased with the way it sounds, but the amount of echo and reverb all over is berserk! That's what we wanted to do at the time, but we really went to the extreme. I do really like it and with the outtakes, there were things we'd genuinely completely forgotten about. There's one song called *Last Thing On My Mind*, which I think was recorded between 'So Tough' and 'Tiger Bay' (1994) - probably before 'So Tough' came out, because it was done a year before it was released - when we wanted to do a kind of pop/techno thing. Of course, 'Tiger Bay' ended up having the folk element, but that was one of the songs we recorded right at the beginning and it still sounds great."

It was a regularity in Saint Etienne's history that their albums would be completed far in advance of their release, a fact that's never concerned the band since their recordings are usually left of commercial. "We're finishing a new album at the moment, which is gonna come out in the autumn, so I hope it sounds alright and not completely dated by then," he laughs. "But we thought the last album ['I've Been Trying To Tell You' (2021)] sounded like nothing we've done before and people were saying, 'Oh, it's great, you're going back to how you used to sound', so I don't know..."

Is that something they're keen to lean into again this time around? "Well, we're recording two albums at the same time - one of which is more mainstream and one of which is a follow-up to the last one," Bob reveals. "A lot of people really liked the last one, which I was very pleased about, and it went into the Top 20, which we haven't done since the '90s. So we thought we'd look to take that to the next step and at the same time, so we don't all just fall asleep, we thought we'd try and write some uptempo songs. So we've probably got about half a dozen uptempo tracks, which will probably be the album after, I guess..." **RP**

● ***'So Tough (30th Anniversary Boxset)' is out January 19 on Heavenly.***

Go West (l-r):
Peter Cox,
Richard Drummie

With their second album, 'Dancing On The Couch', the subject of an expanded reissue, **Go West**'s Peter Cox and Richard Drummie revisit their 1986 sophomore LP!

WORDS SIMON BUTTON

Going into the studio in 1986 to record their second album, Go West were on a roll.

Released the previous year, their self-titled debut had reached No. 8 in the UK and featured four hit singles: *We Close Our Eyes*, *Call Me*, *Goodbye Girl* and *Don't Look Down*.

There was every reason to suspect their second album, 'Dancing On The Couch', would result in another bunch of hits. It didn't. Devout Go West fans hold the 1987 album in high regard, but it peaked at No. 18 and the three singles from it - *True Colours*, *I Want to Hear It From You* and *The King Is Dead* - were huge disappointments, only making it to No. 48, 43 and 67, respectively.

CROSSFIRE

When I tell singer Peter Cox that it's my favourite of all the duo's albums, he deadpans: "You're in a very small club there." But the new reissue of 'Dancing On The Couch' makes it ripe for reassessment and features not just the original long-player in remastered form, but also a disc of B-sides, remixes and rarities, plus a CD and DVD of the Hammersmith Odeon gig from their 'Runaway Train' tour. There's an additional 20-page booklet chronicling the album's genesis.

Peter and his guitarist bandmate, Richard Drummie, had spent all of 1985 promoting their debut album and its singles, and in early 1986 they headed off to the Isle Of Man to begin work on the second one.

In a way, it was a reaction to how they'd been marketed by Chrysalis Records, who'd signed them after being impressed by their demos for *We Close Our Eyes* and *Call Me*. They were packaged as a pop act. "With lots of references to Wham!," Peter laughs. "The label must have thought they were luckier than they actually were."

But if they didn't scale the dizzy heights of George and Andrew's success, Cox and Drummie rewarded their record company's faith with all those hits, although the duo fought against their image as hunky pop stars in vests. "I was 29 by the time we got signed to Chrysalis," the now-68-year-old Cox muses, "which, of course, by today's standard is positively ancient. I remember the marketing department telling me early on that I needed to start lying about my age, which I wasn't prepared to do because I knew, ultimately, we'd get found out and then look even sillier.

"With 'Dancing On The Couch', we were reacting to having been marketed in a very poppy kind of way. We were a bit mystified and in shock at the success of the first album and wanted to go in a slightly different direction."

"At gigs, there were all these screaming girls," Richard, 64, adds. "I guess the way we were sold was as much to do with the way we looked as the music, with us wearing vests and being asked to hold our arms up in the

"WITH 'DANCING ON THE COUCH', WE WERE REACTING TO HAVING BEEN MARKETED IN A VERY POPPY KIND OF WAY"

PETER

air to make our biceps stick out. We did fight against it, but when you've dreamed of getting a record deal since you were a teenager, you don't rock the boat too much. When it came to the second album, we thought that we had a bit of leeway to branch out a bit."

Thus, we got *From Baltimore to Paris* (inspired by the abdication of Edward VIII in 1936) and *Little Caesar* (about the actor Edward G. Robinson being hounded by the House Un-American Activities Committee) amongst the more upbeat pop stuff...

TRUE COLOURS

Peter and Richard had been writing together since as early as 1980, forming the band a couple of years later. "So there was a good few years' worth of songs on that first album," Richard points out. "When it came out, it was pretty much work, work, work every day. I think we had a week or two off at the end of the year and when I went to New Zealand for a break around Christmas, I took a keyboard with me so I could work on new songs."

With the Isle Of Man, the idea was to stay focussed. "But I do think it's quite odd to divorce yourself from the real world," he adds. "I write songs about

> **WHEN YOU'VE DREAMED OF GETTING A RECORD DEAL SINCE YOU WERE A TEENAGER, YOU DON'T ROCK THE BOAT TOO MUCH**
>
> **RICHARD**

things that pop into my head during the day and if you're in the same house with the same people, not going out very much, I'm not sure that that's a very creative environment."

They spent a few months working on tracks in a four-bedroom bungalow, followed by a recording studio in Denmark. Looking back, they'd have taken more time, with Peter saying now: "We were coming off the back of a successful debut album and we needed to deliver the second one much more quickly. I think that the album suffered for that reason and when we went into the studio, I'm not convinced that we had the 10 strong songs that we needed."

They did, however, have a very special guest vocalist on *The King is Dead*. Guitarist Alan Murphy, who worked with them on their first album and co-wrote some of the tracks on 'Dancing On The Couch', had also been in Kate Bush's band. When they listened to the first version of the song, Peter said it needed a big female vocal in the middle and Richard agreed, saying it would benefit from "a load of Kate Bushes, like a Kate Bush choir".

Murphy said, "Well, why don't you ask her?", and made the call on their behalf. Bush said yes but she wasn't keen on flying, so they sent her a tape, she did her bit, then sent it back to them in Denmark. They unwrapped it, "And it was like 'Wow this is amazing'," Peter marvels. "That was a very exciting day." Richard concurs: "When it came back, it was like opening all your Christmas presents at once."

To say 'thank you', they bought Kate an antique vase and presented it to her at her home in Greenwich. Peter can't quite recall what it was like meeting Bush in person: "Perhaps I was intimidated being in the presence of greatness in a way, even though, of course, Kate is a very gentle soul." For his part, Richard remembers her being "just really lovely".

True Colours was one of the first songs they wrote for the album, but when released that November it failed to take off, which baffled them. "In the process of working on the boxset," Peter says, "I had occasion to read some reviews which were brutally less than kind about *True Colours*. I know there are Go West fans for whom that's not their favourite song we've ever written, but at the time we felt good enough about it to make it the first single from the second album. Obviously it was

very disappointing that we got such an ice-cold reaction to it."

CHINESE WHISPERS

Most of the album was already in the bag and Chrysalis were worried there wasn't another potential single on it, so Cox and Drummie quickly wrote *I Want To Hear It From You*, only to see it also underperform when it came out in April 1987.

'Dancing On The Couch' dropped a month later, with a title inspired by a home video they'd made of themselves in the Isle Of Man mucking about and dancing on a sofa. The cover image of them lounging on a different couch with the Houses Of Parliament in the background was done on the fly. "It was guerrilla style," Peter recalls. "We waited until there were no police around, did the shots, then removed the couch before we got arrested."

The album did nowhere near as well as 'Go West', but at least the boys hadn't squandered their money. As Peter puts it: "I remember watching Bros on the TV when we were some way into our career and they were at the beginning of theirs. Everything was going swimmingly and they were talking about the number of cars that they'd each bought. I was shouting at the TV going, 'Guys, don't spend all the money, it doesn't last forever!' When you're riding the crest of that very brief wave, you're thinking it's going to go on forever but, of course, it doesn't always and it didn't for us."

I suggest that reaching No. 19 was actually quite respectable for an album that didn't yield any hits, but as the vocalist says: "Any label wants the next thing to be bigger and better than the last thing. It's fair to say that we didn't make as 'commercial' an album for all of the reasons I've already explained. There are some songs on there of which I'm less pleased and proud, but there are also some songs which I think do stand the test of time, like *Little Caesar*, *From Baltimore To Paris* and *The King Is Dead*." Drummie agrees, citing *Masque Of Love* as another track that's endured.

The band would eventually return to chart glory with the 1990 release of *The King Of Wishful Thinking*, which saw them crack the US Top 10, but not before a standoff between the duo and the label's new head of A&R. "I can only guess that he was given the task of, 'Right, you've got to get these guys back into line', and I didn't see things at all in the same way as he did," Peter ruminates. "I told him what I thought about his work process and he said: 'Until you do what I say, there'll be no more money'."

> **I WRITE SONGS ABOUT THINGS THAT POP INTO MY HEAD DURING THE DAY AND IF YOU'RE IN THE SAME HOUSE WITH THE SAME PEOPLE, I'M NOT SURE THAT'S A VERY CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT**
>
> **RICHARD**

They were in a creative wilderness for a couple of years, before bouncing back after their previous A&R man, Ron Fair, contacted them from the States, saying he wanted to work with them again. Drummie felt the new song was a sure thing. "I'm the gobby one in the band so I phoned the record company and said, 'We've written a hit'. They came down to listen to it and went 'You *have* written a hit!'"

Ron wanted to feature it on the 'Pretty Woman' soundtrack, but Richard was dead against it. At the time the film was called '3000', which sounded like a sci-fi title ("And I'm not a massive science fiction fan"), but he was assured it was a romantic comedy. "Then they said it was about this guy who rents a prostitute for the week for $3,000 and I went, 'That's a romantic comedy, is it?' So I fought against it and I lost."

He laughs: "Thank God I lost, otherwise I'd be sitting in a different kitchen than I am now..." **RP**

● ***'Dancing On The Couch' is out January 26 on Chrysalis.***

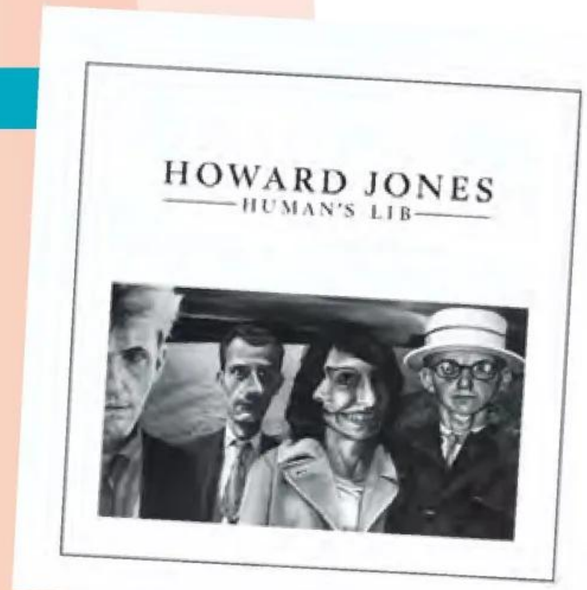
PHOTOS KEVIN CLARK, BRIAN GRIFFIN

“WHEN YOU’RE RIDING THE CREST OF THAT VERY BRIEF WAVE, YOU’RE THINKING IT’S GOING TO GO ON FOREVER BUT, OF COURSE, IT DOESN’T ALWAYS”

PETER

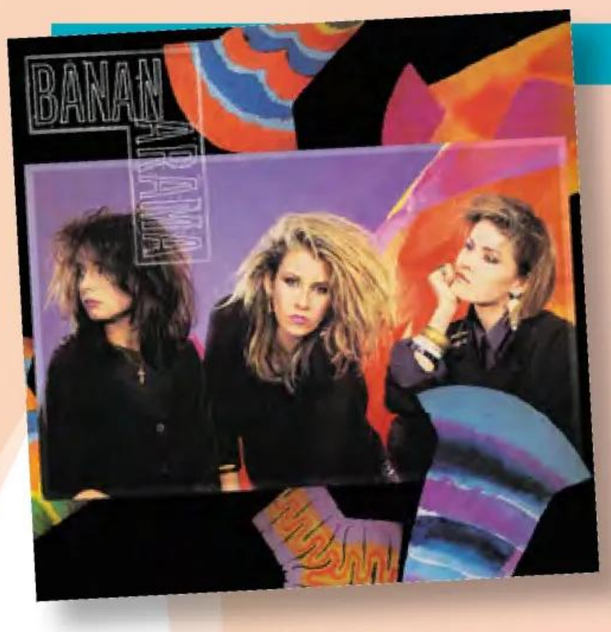
TURNING 40 in 2024

1984: Band Aid, the miners' strike, numerous scientific discoveries - and a whole load of pop classics!



HOWARD JONES
HUMAN'S LIB
RELEASED: **MARCH 1984**

The debut album from the British synth-pop legend saw the Southampton-born star launch into the UK Albums Chart at No. 1 on the back of a run of four Top 20 hits: *New Song* (No. 3), *What Is Love?* (No. 2), *Hide And Seek* (No. 12) and *Pearl In The Shell* (No. 7). Primarily produced by Rupert Hine, the LP spent a total of 57 weeks in the charts, becoming one of the Top 20 best-selling albums of the year, charting across Europe and entering the US Billboard Hot 100.

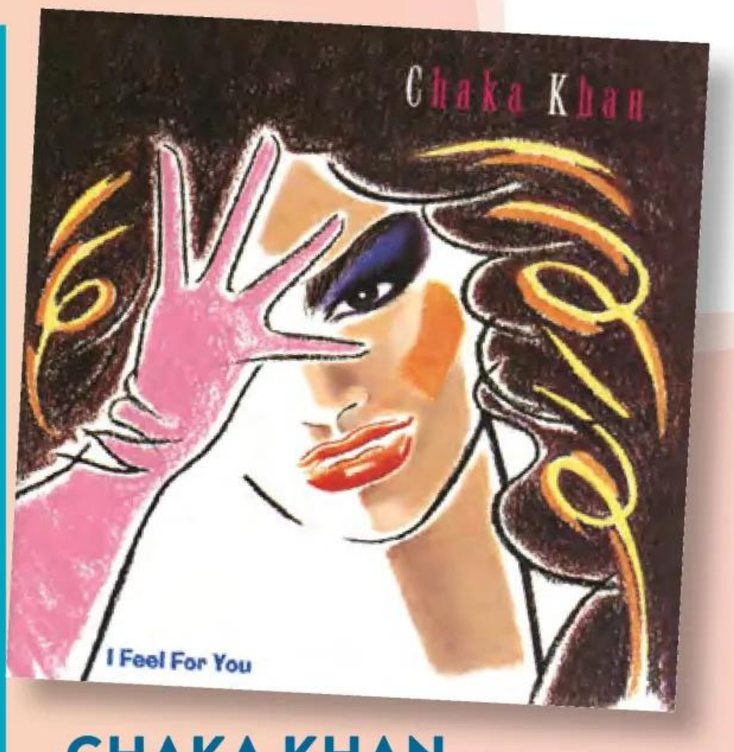


BANANARAMA
SELF-TITLED
RELEASED: **APRIL 1984**

Continuing their association with producers Jolley & Swain, who had produced some tracks on their debut album, 'Deep Sea Skiving' (1983), the second LP from the British girl group launched them internationally thanks to the success of *Cruel Summer*, which went Top 10 in the US upon its inclusion in the soundtrack to the 1984 film 'The Karate Kid'. Other singles for the album include the hits *Robert De Niro's Waiting...* (No. 3) and *Rough Justice* (No. 23).

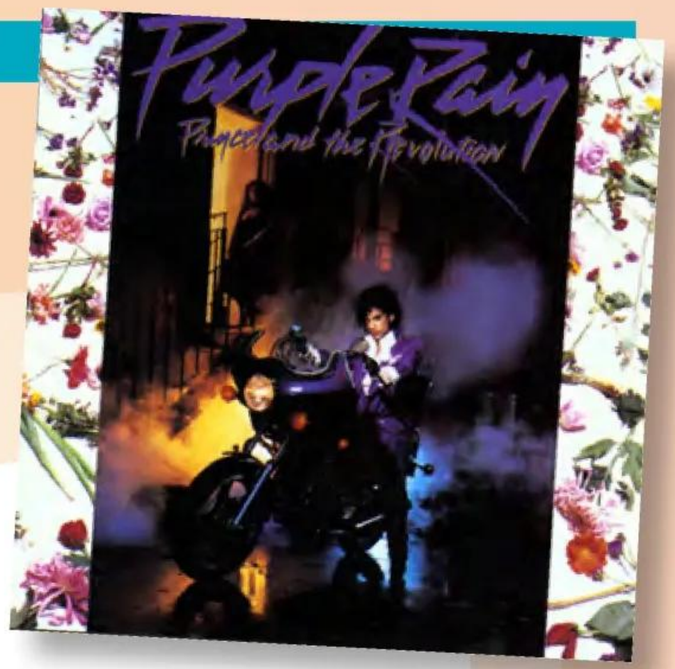
TINA TURNER
PRIVATE DANCER
RELEASED: **MAY 1984**

Although her fifth solo LP - arriving a decade into her solo career - 'Private Dancer' propelled Turner into becoming a viable solo star and marked a turning point in her rise to become one of the most successful singers in pop history. Overseen by four different production teams, including Rupert Hine, Terry Britten and Martyn Ware of Heaven 17, singles include *Let's Stay Together* (No. 6), *Help!* (No. 40), *Private Dancer* (No. 26) and *What's Love Got To Do With It* (No. 3) - her first and only US No. 1.



CHAKA KHAN
I FEEL FOR YOU
RELEASED: **OCTOBER 1984**

Having balanced two simultaneous careers as a member of Rufus and as a solo performer between 1978 and 1983, Chaka Khan recorded the album that was to make her a pop megastar. Led by the title song - a cover of Prince's 1979 classic, featuring Grandmaster Melle Mel on the iconic rap opening - the track topped the UK charts, with *This Is My Night* (No. 14) and Eye To Eye (No. 16) also performing well.



PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION
PURPLE RAIN
RELEASED: **JUNE 1984**

The soundtrack album to the 1984 film of the same name, 'Purple Rain' offered a more grandiose, synthesised dimension to the classic Prince sound, while leaning towards the more experimental records he would release in the years that followed. Becoming his first album to reach No. 1 on the Billboard 200 - where it spent 24 consecutive weeks atop - singles include *When Doves Cry* (No. 4), *Let's Go Crazy* (No. 7), *Purple Rain* (No. 6) and Take Me With U (No. 7).

BRONSKI BEAT
THE AGE OF CONSENT

RELEASED: **OCTOBER 1984**

With a title inspired by the UK's government to reduce the age of consent for homosexual relationships from 21 to 16, the debut album by the synth-poppers - Steve Bronski, Larry Steinbachek and Jimmy Somerville - produced three UK Top 20 hits: *Smalltown Boy* (No. 3), *Why?* (No. 6) and *It Ain't Necessarily So* (No. 16). Despite going Top 5, it was the only Bronski Beat album to feature Somerville.

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
WELCOME TO THE PLEASUREDOME

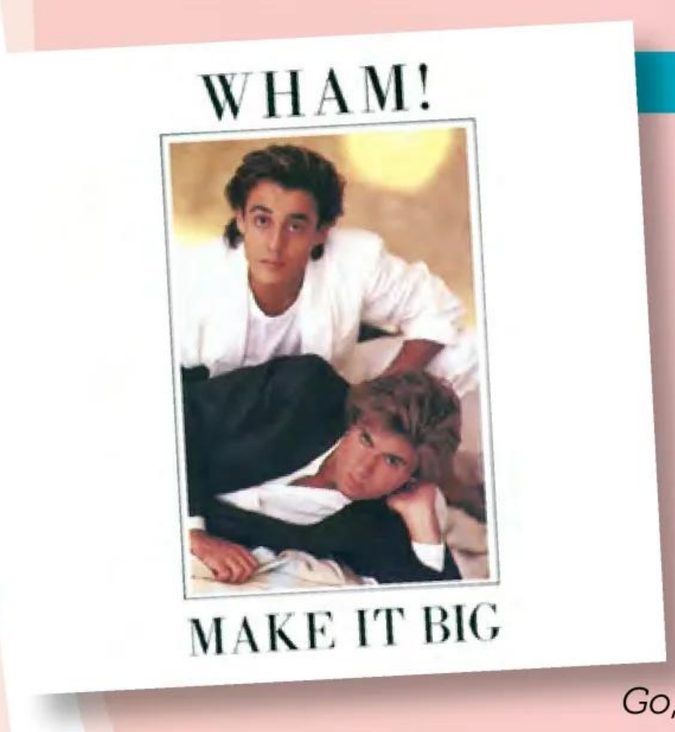
RELEASED: **OCTOBER 1984**

The debut studio album from the synth-pop group, fronted by Holly Johnson, propelled them to the top of the UK charts and Top 10 internationally. Spearheaded by a trio of chart-topping hits - *Relax*, *Two Tribes* and *The Power Of Love* - the Trevor Horn-produced collection swiftly became one of the Top 10 best-selling albums of the year - and Top 40 of 1985 - shifting over one million copies in the UK alone.

ALISON MOYET
ALF

RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 1984**

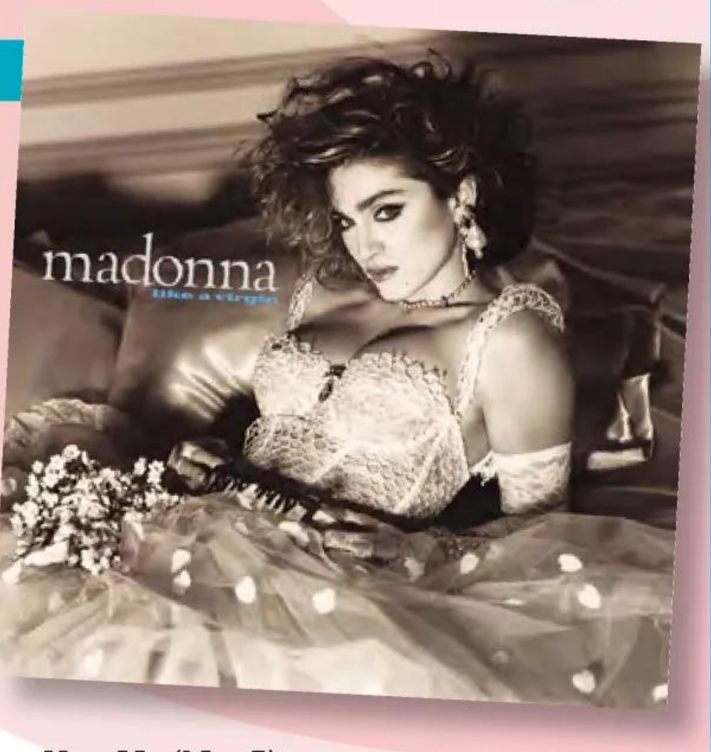
Following the release of Yazoo's second album, 'You And Me Both' (1983), Alison Moyet and Vince Clarke went their separate ways and the vocalist soon signed a solo deal and teamed up with Jolley & Swain - based on their success with Spandau Ballet and Bananarama - on what became 'Alf'. Entering the charts with her debut single, *Love Resurrection* (No. 10), the record also produced the hit singles *All Cried Out* (No. 8) and *Invisible* (No. 21).



WHAM!
MAKE IT BIG

RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 1984**

The second studio album from George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley, 'Make It Big' continued the duo's rise through the pop ranks and saw them hit the top of the charts on both sides of the Atlantic, with three UK and US No. 1 singles. Over here, *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, *Careless Whisper* and *Freedom* reached the summit, while the latter peaked at No. 3 Stateside and *Everything She Wants* (No. 2) topped the Billboard Hot 100.



MADONNA
LIKE A VIRGIN

RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 1984**

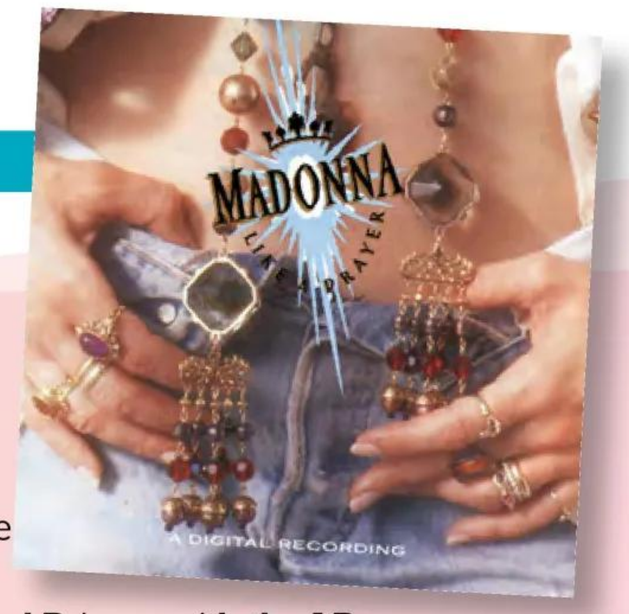
Following the success of her self-titled debut, Madonna chose Nile Rodgers to produce the follow-up due to his work with David Bowie. She wrote six songs on the record - five of which feature Steve Bray as a co-writer - and recorded the LP swiftly in New York. Alongside its classic title song (No. 3), the LP also featured the singles *Material Girl* (No. 3), *Angel* (No. 5) and *Dress You Up* (No. 5).

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 1984

1. BAND AID — *Do They Know It's Christmas?*
2. STEVIE WONDER — *I Just Called To Say I Love You*
3. FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD — *Relax*
4. FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD — *Two Tribes*
5. GEORGE MICHAEL — *Careless Whisper*
6. WHAM! — *Last Christmas / Everything She Wants*
7. LIONEL RICHIE — *Hello*
8. BLACK LACE — *Agadoo*
9. RAY PARKER JR. — *Ghostbusters*
10. WHAM! — *Freedom*

TURNING 35 in 2024

1989: A year full of political tensions, it was a turbulent time - but not for Stock Aitken Waterman, whose star continued to shine!

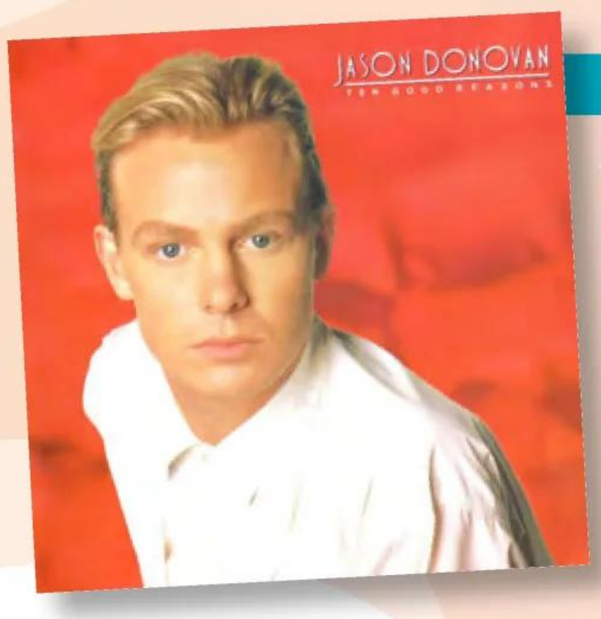


MADONNA
LIKE A PRAYER
RELEASED: **MARCH 1989**

The fourth studio album by Madonna saw the Queen Of Pop co-writing and -producing all of the songs alongside collaborators such as Stephen Bray, Patrick Leonard, and Prince, with the LP dedicated to her mother, who died when she was five. Alongside the hit singles *Like A Prayer* (No. 1), *Express Yourself* (No. 5), *Cherish* (No. 3) and *Dear Jessie* (No. 5), it also came packaged with safe sex guidelines and a warning about the dangers of AIDS.

DONNA SUMMER
ANOTHER PLACE AND TIME
RELEASED: **MARCH 1989**

Produced by Stock Aitken Waterman, 'Another Place And Time' saw the Queen Of Disco' return to the upper regions of the charts with a 10-song collection of Europop hits, spearheaded by the Top 10 classic, *This Time I Know It's For Real* (No. 3). Despite follow-ups *I Don't Wanna Get Hurt* (No. 7) and *Love's About To Change My Heart* (No. 20) both performing well, it would be her only collaboration with the hitmaking trio.



JASON DONOVAN
TEN GOOD REASONS
RELEASED: **MAY 1989**

Having debuted the previous summer with *Nothing Can Divide Us* (No. 5), Jason Donovan had achieved pop pin-up status come Christmas thanks to his loved-up Kylie Minogue duet, *Especially For You* (No. 1), and kept the momentum going with *Too Many Broken Hearts* (No. 1). Also including *Sealed With A Kiss* (No. 1) and *Every Day (I Love You More)* (No. 2), it's the first of two collaborations with Stock Aitken Waterman.

LISA STANSFIELD
AFFECTION
RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 1989**

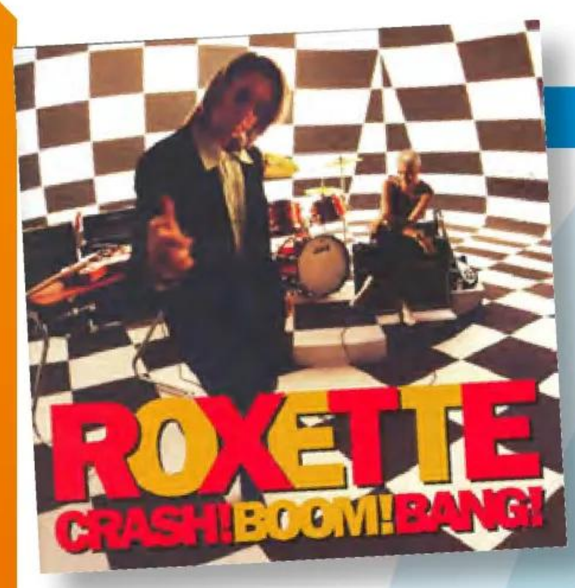
The debut album from the British star, Lisa Stansfield co-wrote all songs on 'Affection' with Ian Devaney and Andy Morris, with the latter duo also serving as producers on all tracks except for *This Is the Right Time* (No. 13), which was produced by Coldcut. Its other singles include *Live Together* (No. 10), *What Did I Do To You?* (No. 25) and *All Around The World* (No. 1), which also went Top 3 on the US Billboard Hot 100.

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 1989

1. BLACK BOX — *Ride On Time*
2. JIVE BUNNY & THE MASTERMIXERS — *Swing The Mood*
3. BANGLES — *Eternal Flame*
4. JASON DONOVAN — *Too Many Broken Hearts*
5. SOUL II SOUL — *Back To Life (Feat. Caron Wheeler)*
6. MARC ALMOND — *Somethings Gotten Hold Of My Heart (Feat. Gene Pitney)*
7. JIVE BUNNY & THE MASTERMIXERS — *That's What I Like*
8. TECHNOTRONIC — *Pump Up The Jam (Feat. Felly)*
9. BAND AID II — *Do They Know It's Christmas?*
10. KYLIE MINOGUE — *Hand On Your Heart*

TURNING 30 in 2024

1994: Nelson Mandela was sworn in as South Africa's first Black President - and in the charts, a new generation of pop stars emerged!



ROXETTE
CRASH! BOOM! BANG!
RELEASED: **APRIL 1994**

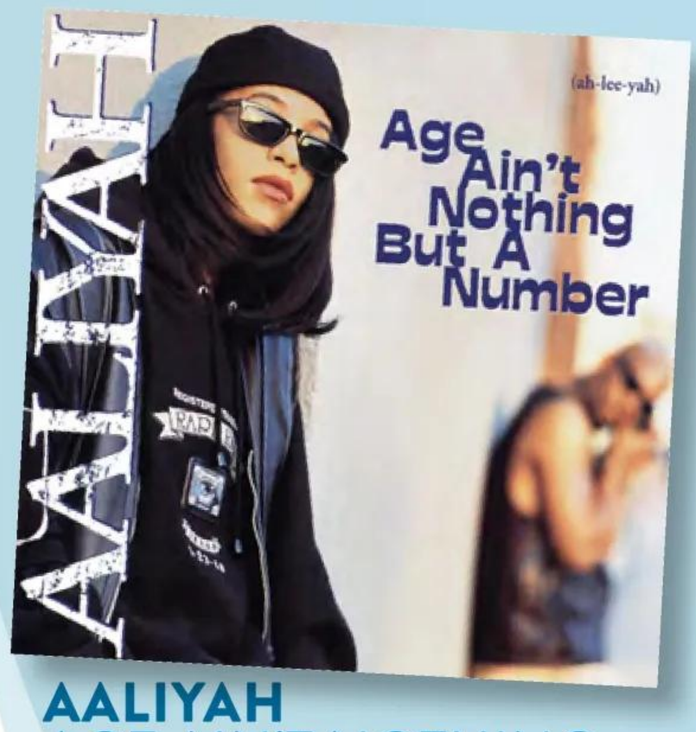
Prior to its international release, a shorter version of the album was released by CEMA exclusively through McDonald's in the US, with 'Favorites From Crash! Boom! Bang!' shifting over a million copies and proceeds going to Ronald McDonald House Charities. Upon its release, the record became a chart hit globally, peaking at No. 3 in the UK and spawning the singles *Sleeping In My Car* (No. 14), *Crash! Boom! Bang!* (No. 24), *Fireworks* (No. 30) and *Run To You* (No. 27).

BLUR
PARKLIFE
RELEASED: **APRIL 1994**

Helping to define the emerging Britpop scene, 'Parklife' marked a turning point in Blur's career, helped by its four hit singles: *Girls & Boys* (No. 5), *To The End* (No. 16), *Parklife* (No. 10) and *End Of A Century* (No. 19). Propping up the broader Cool Britannia movement, the LP won Best British Album at the 1995 BRIT Awards and sold over one million copies, with its artwork one of 10 classic album covers commemorated on a UK postage stamp issued by Royal Mail in 2010.

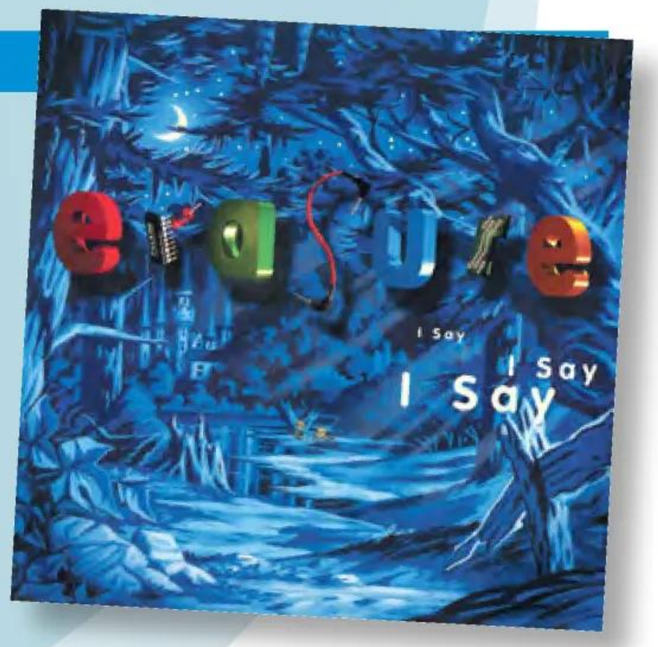
SEAL
SEAL II
RELEASED: **MAY 1994**

The second eponymous studio album by the British singer once again reunited him with Trevor Horn and continued his global dominance, with the LP returning him to the Top of the UK charts, US Top 20, and delivering the worldwide smash hit single, *Kiss From A Rose* (No. 4). Other tracks from the record - which features a now-iconic image of Seal that's been used on various releases - include *Prayer For The Dying* (No. 14) and the Joni Mitchell duet, *If I Could*.



AALIYAH
AGE AIN'T NOTHING BUT A NUMBER
RELEASED: **JUNE 1994**

The debut record from the late R&B singer arrived when she was just 15 years old and saw her achieve instant success in the US, with the LP peaking at No. 18 on the Billboard 200 and delivering a duo of Top 10 hits. Over here, all four singles entered the Top 40, including *Back & Forth* (No. 16), a cover of the Isley Brothers' *At Your Best (You Are Love)* (No. 27), *Age Ain't Nothing But A Number* (No. 32) and *Down With The Clique* (No. 33).



ERASURE
I SAY I SAY I SAY
RELEASED: **MAY 1994**

Produced by Martyn Ware, the sixth album from Erasure saw the synth-pop duo continue their success and showcased Vince Clarke's penchant for pre-MIDI analog synthesisers and sequencers, becoming their fifth UK No. 1 album and marking their US Top 20 debut. Additionally, the single *Always* (No. 4) peaked in the Top 20 of the Billboard Hot 100, and *Run To The Sun* (No. 6) and *I Love Saturday* (No. 20) were both moderate hits in the UK and across Europe.

OASIS
DEFINITELY MAYBE
RELEASED: **AUGUST 1994**

Another key player in the Britpop movement, the debut album from the Gallagher brothers and co. proved to be an immediate critical and commercial success, arriving on the heels of the singles *Supersonic* (No. 31), *Shakermaker* (No. 11) and Live Forever (No. 10), and later delivering a final hit with *Cigarettes & Alcohol* (No. 7). It went straight to No. 1 on the UK Albums Chart and became the fastest-selling debut album in British music history at the time, with eventual sales of over 2.4 million units.

KYLIE MINOGUE
SELF-TITLED
RELEASED: **SEPTEMBER 1994**

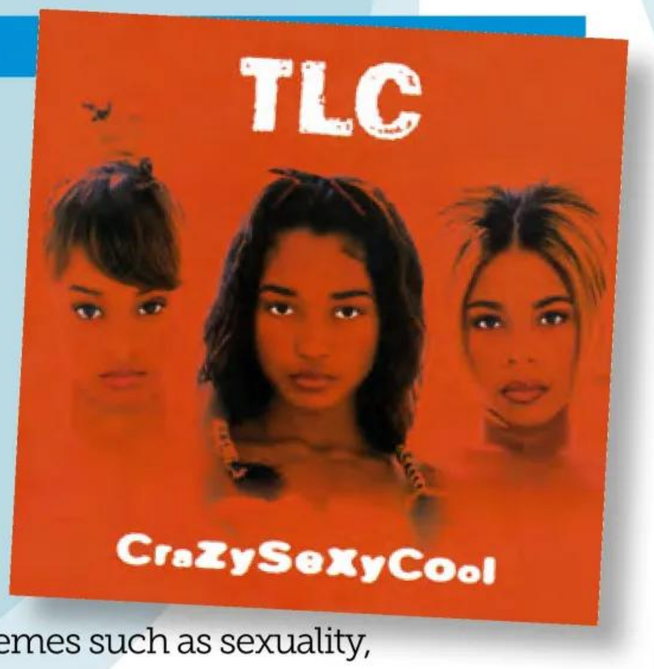
After leaving PWL, where she earned her pop credentials, Kylie Minogue wanted to establish her credibility and signed with Deconstruction, working with new producers including Brothers In Rhythm, M People, Farley & Heller and Jimmy Harry on a record worlds away from her previous releases. Fusing elements of dance, R&B and adult contemporary music, the LP spawned three UK Top 20 hits: *Confide In Me* (No. 2), *Put Yourself In My Place* (No. 11) and *Where Is the Feeling?* (No. 16).

EAST 17
STEAM
RELEASED: **OCTOBER 1994**

The second studio album from the 'bad boys' of pop, 'Steam' saw East 17 at their most consistent, building upon the foundations of their chart-topping debut, 'Walthamstow' (1993), and delivering a run of hits with *Around The World* (No. 3), *Steam* (No. 7), *Let It Rain* (No. 10) and *Hold My Body Tight* (No. 12). Its biggest hit, *Stay Another Day* (No. 1), written by Tony Mortimer about the suicide of his brother Ollie, became the 1994 Christmas chart-topper and has become synonymous with the holidays.

MARIAH CAREY
MERRY CHRISTMAS
RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 1994**

Arriving on the back of her hugely successful third album, 'Music Box' (1993), the US diva's fourth LP collected holiday classics and original compositions, co-written by Mariah and Walter Afanasieff, who also served as producer. Three singles were released from the album, of which *All I Want for Christmas Is You* went on to become one of the best-selling singles of all time and was selected by the Library of Congress for inclusion in the National Recording Registry last year.



TLC
CRAZYSEXYCOOL
RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 1994**

Following the release of the group's debut album, 'Oooooooohhh... On the TLC Tip' (1992), the trio reunited with producers Dallas Austin, Kenneth 'Babyface' Edmonds and Jermaine Dupri, as well as new collaborators Organized Noize and Chucky Thompson, on a coming-of-age, hip-hop-inspired collection that explored themes such as sexuality, romanticism and youth. One of the best-selling US albums of the decade, it delivered the UK Top 10s *Creep* (No. 6) and *Waterfalls* (No. 4) - both of which went to No. 1 in the States.

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 1994

1. WET WET WET — *Love Is All Around*
2. WHIGFIELD — *Saturday Night*
3. EAST 17 — *Stay Another Day*
4. PATO BANTON — *Baby Come Back (Feat. Ali And Robin Campbell)*
5. ALL-4-ONE — *I Swear*
6. BON JOVI — *Always*
7. MARIAH CAREY — *Without You*
8. LET LOOSE — *Crazy For You*
9. DOOP — *Doop*
10. ACE OF BASE — *The Sign*

TURNING 25 in 2024

1999: Space Shuttle Discovery became the first vessel to dock with the International Space Station - and slowly the Spice Girls started to go solo!

BRITNEY SPEARS
...BABY ONE MORE TIME
RELEASED: **JANUARY 1999**

Having travelled to Sweden to collaborate with producers Max Martin and Rami Yacoub, the former 'Mickey Mouse Club' star delivered a pop classic with her debut album receiving a nomination for Best New Artist at the 42nd Annual Grammy Awards and later being acknowledged for its influence on pop culture. Alongside the title song (No. 1), it spawned the singles *Sometimes* (No. 3), *(You Drive Me) Crazy* (No. 5) and *Born To Make You Happy* (No. 1).

GERI HALLIWELL
SCHIZOPHONIC
RELEASED: **JUNE 1999**

Released after her split from the Spice Girls, 'Schizophonic' launched Geri Halliwell as a ready-made pop star, with its lead single, *Look At Me*, peaking at No. 2. Its follow-ups - *Mi Chico Latino* (No. 1), *Lift Me Up* (No. 1) and *Bag It Up* (No. 1) - were all mega-hits, while the LP debuted at No. 4 on the UK charts. It was released with two different covers, representing an angel (white) and a devil (red), although both are the same edition of the album.

DIDO
NO ANGEL
RELEASED: **JUNE 1999**

First making a name for herself in the UK, Dido's first long-player rose to become one of the best-selling albums in UK chart history, thanks to a run of hit singles including *Here With Me* (No. 4), *Thank You* (No. 3) and *Hunter* (No. 17). The album found a global audience when it was released worldwide in February 2001 and was also among 10 albums nominated for the Best British Album of the previous 30 years by the BRIT Awards in 2010.

S CLUB 7
S CLUB
RELEASED: **OCTOBER 1999**

Arriving on the back of their TV debut in the hit 'Miami 7', which featured the band performing songs from the LP, their first album took the band to the upper regions of the UK charts. Primarily produced by StarGate, Absolute, Dufflebag Boys, Eliot Kennedy and Mike Percy, and delivered a run of classic singles, including *Bring It All Back* (No. 1), *S Club Party* (No. 2) and *Two In A Million / You're My Number One* (No. 2).

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 1999

1. BRITNEY SPEARS — *Baby One More Time*
2. EIFFEL 65 — *Blue (Da Ba Dee)*
3. CLIFF RICHARD — *The Millennium Prayer*
4. LOU BEGBA — *Mambo No. 5 (A Little Bit Of...)*
5. ATB — *9pm (Till I Come)*
6. RICKY MARTIN — *Livin' La Vida Loca*
7. SHANIA TWAIN — *That Don't Impress Me Much*
8. SHANKS & BIGFOOT — *Sweet Like Chocolate*
9. MR. OIZO — *Flat Beat*
10. BOYZONE — *When The Going Gets Tough*

TURNING 20 in 2024

2004: The Nintendo DS was *the* gift this Christmas - along with some of these pop gems, of course!

SCISSOR SISTERS
SCISSOR SISTERS

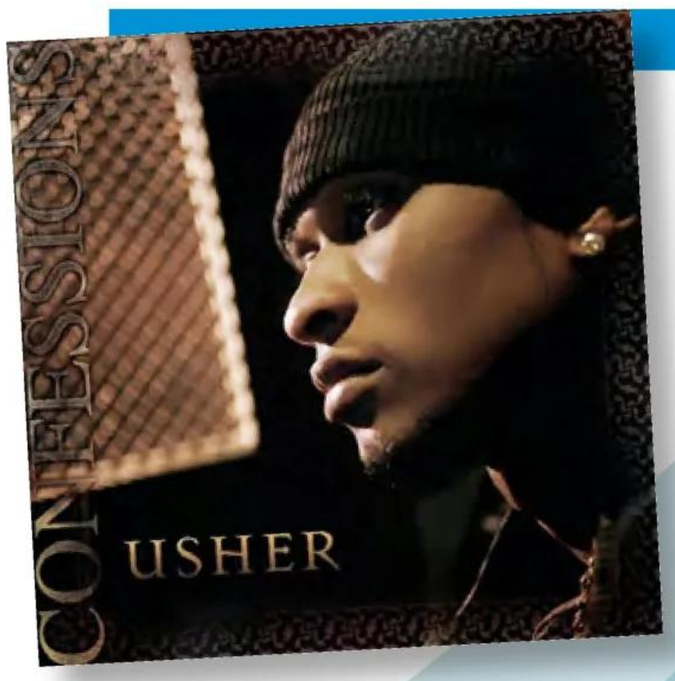
RELEASED: **FEBRUARY 2004**

Celebrating LGBTQ+ life in New York City, the debut album from Jake Shears, Ana Matronic and co. marked their debut atop the UK Albums Chart and became the best-selling LP of 2004, selling over 2.7 million copies in the country alone since its release. The eponymous project won Best International Album at the 2005 BRIT Awards and delivered a run of hit singles, including *Laura* (No. 12), *Comfortably Numb* (No. 10), *Take Your Mama* (No. 17), *Mary* (No. 14) and *Filthy/Gorgeous* (No. 5).

EMMA BUNTON
FREE ME

RELEASED: **FEBRUARY 2004**

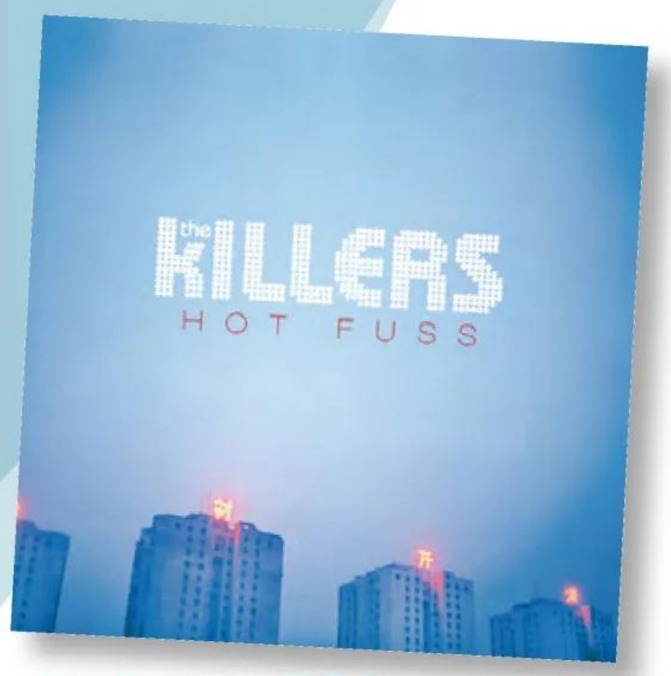
The second solo outing from the Spice Girls star was hotly-anticipated on the release slate after her previous LP delivered the chart-topping *What Took You So Long?* and Top 5 *Take My Breath Away*. But, she left Virgin Records and signed with Simon Fuller's 19 for its follow-up, which was inspired by 1960s sounds, such as bossa nova, Motown and French pop, and featured the hits *Free Me* (No. 5), *Maybe* (No. 6), *I'll Be There* (No. 7) and *Crickets Sing For Anamaria* (No. 15).



USHER
CONFESSIONS

RELEASED: **MARCH 2004**

Recorded with longtime collaborator Jermaine Dupri, along with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis and Lil Jon, among others, 'Confessions' showcased the US superstar's smooth vocals on a mix of ballads and up-tempos, incorporating elements of dance-pop and hip-hop. It delivered four UK Top 5 hits: *Yeah!* (No. 1), *Burn* (No. 1), *Confessions Part II* (No. 5) and *My Boo* (No. 5).



THE KILLERS
HOT FUSS

RELEASED: **JUNE 2004**

The first of eight UK chart-topping albums from the US rockers, led by Brandon Flowers, 'Hot Fuss' introduced The Killers to the world with its lead single *Mr. Brightside* (No. 10), which went on to become the longest-charting single on the Singles Chart Top 100, having spent over seven years on the countdown to date. Other hits from the LP include *Somebody Told Me* (No. 3), *All These Things That I've Done* (No. 18) and *Smile Like You Mean It* (No. 11).

GEORGE MICHAEL
PATIENCE

RELEASED: **MARCH 2004**

The final studio album from the late pop legend was billed as his big comeback, eight years after his previous LP, 'Older', and marked his return to Sony for the first time since 1990's 'Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1'. Becoming one of the fastest-selling albums in the UK, selling over 275,000 copies in the first week, it topped the charts and delivered an epic run of singles including *Freeek!* (No. 7), *Shoot The Dog* (No. 12), *Amazing* (No. 4) and *Flawless (Go To The City)* (No. 8).

KEANE
HOPES AND FEARS
RELEASED: **MAY 2004**

The UK's second best-selling album of 2004 and one of the highest-selling of the decade, the first album from Keane introduced the band to the world and spent several stints at No. 1, including a return to the summit after winning a BRIT Award for Best Album. Its singles include *Everybody's Changing* (No. 4), *This Is The Last Time* (No. 18), *Somewhere Only We Know* (No. 3) and *Bedshaped* (No. 10).

NATASHA BEDINGFIELD
UNWRITTEN
RELEASED: **SEPTEMBER 2004**

With her brother Daniel already a household name, Natasha Bedingfield launched her own pop legacy in 2004 with her classic debut album, which soon rocketed to the top of the UK charts and shifted over a million copies in the country alone. It also made waves internationally - including in the US - thanks to a run of hit singles including *Single* (No. 3), *These Words* (No. 1), *Unwritten* (No. 6) and *I Bruise Easily* (No. 12).

DURAN DURAN
ASTRONAUT
RELEASED: **OCTOBER 2004**

Reuniting the band with original guitarist Andy Taylor for the first time in three decades, Duran Duran finally returned to the classic five-piece line-up for their 11th studio album, which gave the band a No. 3 hit - their highest-charting album since 'Seven And The Ragged Tiger' in 1983. Its lead single *(Reach Up For The) Sunrise* (No. 5) was the biggest hit from the LP, while follow-up *What Happens Tomorrow* (No. 11) also performed well.

JAMES BLUNT
BACK TO BEDLAM
RELEASED: **OCTOBER 2004**

Love him or loathe him, James Blunt's debut album certainly made an impact - but it took its time doing so. Originally lingering in the lower regions of the charts, it wasn't until the following year that it rose to the top spot following the release of third single, *You're Beautiful* (No. 1). Other singles *Goodbye My Lover* (No. 9), *High* (No. 16) and *Wisemen* (No. 23) also performed well and laid the foundations for one of Britain's most successful singer-songwriters.

GWEN STEFANI
LOVE. ANGEL. MUSIC. BABY.
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2004

Designed to sound like a 1980s dance record, Gwen Stefani's solo debut away from No Doubt incorporated a diverse range of genres, including electro-pop, dance-rock, new wave, and soul, while lyrically exploring themes of fashion, wealth and relationships. In the UK, it delivered a run of hit singles, including *What You Waiting For?*, *Rich Girl (Feat. Eve)* (No. 4), *Hollaback Girl* (No. 8) and *Cool* (No. 11).

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 2004

1. BAND AID 20 — *Do They Know It's Christmas?*
2. EAMON — *Fuck It (I Don't Want You Back)*
3. DJ CASPER — *Cha Cha Slide*
4. ERIC PRYDZ — *Call On Me*
5. USHER — *Yeah! (Feat. Lil' John & Ludacris)*
6. MICHELLE MCMANUS — *All This Time*
7. ANASTACIA — *Left Outside Alone*
8. PETER ANDRE — *Mysterious Girl*
9. BRITNEY SPEARS — *Toxic*
10. FRANKEE — *F.u.r.b. (F U Right Back)*

TURNING 15 in 2024

2009: Barack Obama was inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States of America - and as Girls Aloud take a break, Cheryl goes solo!

PET SHOP BOYS
YES

RELEASED: **MARCH 2009**

Recorded throughout 2008 and produced by Brian Higgins and his production team Xenomania, 'Yes!' gave the synth-pop duo their highest-charting UK album in 13 years, with lead single *Love Etc.* (No. 14) and follow-up *Did You See Me Coming?* (No. 21) becoming chart hits. *The Loving Kind*, an outtake from the sessions, was recorded by Girls Aloud for their fifth and final album, 'Out Of Control' (2008), and released as a single earlier in the year.

KELLY CLARKSON
ALL I EVER WANTED

RELEASED: **MARCH 2009**

Brightening things up after the darker 'My December' (2007), the 'American Idol' winner enlisted her previous collaborators Max Martin, Dr. Luke, Sam Watters and Louis Biancaniello, along with new names like Ryan Tedder and Howard Benson, for a vibrant collection headed up by the singles *My Life Would Suck Without You* (No. 1) and *I Do Not Hook Up* (No. 36) - the latter of which was co-written by Katy Perry.

WHITNEY HOUSTON
I LOOK TO YOU

RELEASED: **AUGUST 2009**

Her first non-holiday studio album since 2002's 'Just Whitney', 'I Look To You' - the final album from Whitney Houston prior to her death - featured the hit single *Million Dollar Bill* (No. 5) and peaked at No. 3 in the UK. Stateside, the record debuted on the US Billboard 200 at No. 1 with sales of 305,000 beating her previous career best first-week sales and extending her as the female artist with the most cumulative weeks at the No. 1 position.

CHERYL COLE
3 WORDS

RELEASED: **OCTOBER 2009**

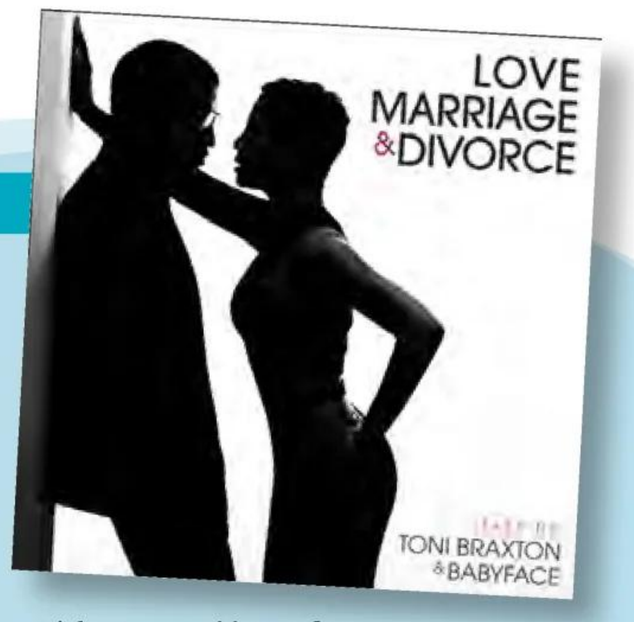
Following her appearance on will.i.am's *Heartbreaker*, the Girls Aloud star started working on solo material in Los Angeles and London, mainly collaborating with the Black Eyed Peas rapper, who served as executive producer of the album. Featuring the mega-hit single, *Fight For This Love* (No. 1), along with the UK No. 4 title song and follow-up *Parachute* (No. 5), the album became her first chart-topper and sold over one million copies.

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 2009

1. LADY GAGA — *Poker Face*
2. BLACK EYED PEAS — *I Gotta Feeling*
3. LADY GAGA — *Just Dance*
4. CHERYL COLE — *Fight For This Love*
5. JOE MCELDERRY — *The Climb*
6. LA ROUX — *In For The Kill*
7. BLACK EYED PEAS — *Boom Boom Pow*
8. RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE — *Killing In The Name*
9. ALEXANDRA BURKE — *Bad Boys (Feat. Flo Rida)*
10. BLACK EYED PEAS — *Meet Me Halfway*

TURNING 10 in 2024

2014: The Scottish independence referendum threatens to break up the UK - but even in the summer, all anyone can talk about is 'Frozen'!



TONI BRAXTON & BABYFACE
LOVE, MARRIAGE & DIVORCE

RELEASED: **FEBRUARY 2014**

A collaboration between two R&B icons, 'Love, Marriage & Divorce' features 11 tracks including their Adult R&B No. 1 single, *Hurt You,* as well as the second single, *Where Did We Go Wrong*. Shortly before the release of the record, Braxton announced that it would be her final studio album - a decision she reversed following its international success, including winning Best R&B Album at the 57th Annual Grammy Awards.

SHAKIRA
SHAKIRA

RELEASED: **MARCH 2014**

Her most recent English language studio album, Shakira's self-titled LP - her 10th overall - incorporated diverse styles including reggae and rock, as well as dance and country elements, led by the massive Rihanna collaboration, *Can't Remember To Forget You* (No. 11). Follow-up *Empire* (No. 25) also enjoyed chart success and the album reached a peak of No. 14 in the UK.

DAMON ALBARN
EVERYDAY ROBOTS

RELEASED: **APRIL 2014**

The solo debut from the Blur and Gorillaz star was co-produced by Richard Russell and features guest contributions from musician and producer Brian Eno, singer Natasha Khan and the Leytonstone City Mission Choir. Billed as his most personal work to date, it was nominated for the 2014 Mercury Prize for best album and peaked at No. 2 on the UK Albums Chart.

SINÉAD O'CONNOR
I'M NOT BOSSY, I'M THE BOSS

RELEASED: **AUGUST 2014**

The 10th and final album from the Irish singer-songwriter, the project was originally called 'The Vishnu Room' after the song of the same name, but was changed, along with its original cover design, shortly before release in support of the Ban Bossy campaign. The album was nominated for the Irish Meteor Choice Music Prize for Best Album and the final to be completed by Sinéad before her death.

TOP 10 SINGLES OF 2014

1. PHARRELL WILLIAMS — *Happy*
2. CLEAN BANDIT FEAT. JESS GLYNNE — *Rather Be*
3. JOHN LEGEND — *All Of Me*
4. MR PROBAZ — *Waves*
5. ELLA HENDERSON — *Ghost*
6. PITBULL FEAT KESHA — *Timber*
7. ED SHEERAN — *Thinking Out Loud*
8. SAM SMITH — *Stay With Me*
9. MEGHAN TRAINOR — *All About That Bass*
10. IDINA MENZEL — *Let It Go*

TALK
OF THE
TOWN

Shed Seven (l-r): Tom Gladwin, Tim Wills, Rick Witter, Rob Maxfield, Paul Banks

Entering their 30th anniversary year with a brand new album, **Shed Seven** prove they're only getting better with the passing of time...

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

Three decades into their career, Shed Seven have finally shed their label as the underdogs of Britpop.

A somewhat unfair assessment - at the height of their popularity, between 1994 and 1999, they had 15 Top 40 singles and four Top 20 albums in the UK - the band made a surprise return to the Top 10 in 2017 with their fifth LP and first in 16 years, 'Instant Pleasures', reinvigorating the York-born alt-rockers to push ahead as more than a nostalgia act.

With its follow-up, 'A Matter Of Time', set for similar success, the band remains hot property, but for singer Rick Witter and guitarist Paul Banks, the key to the magic lies at the heart of their decades-long friendship.

LET'S GO

"It was very much like when we were kids," says Paul of the creative process for their new record, the majority of which was conceived at his family home. Rick would come over a couple of times a week, they'd jam and record a demo, then take the idea to the studio for the rest of the band to play on. "It's very much how we wrote [second album] 'A Maximum High' (1996)."

If that record saw the band come to terms with their newfound success, having broken into the Top 20 with their Gold-selling debut and landed a run of hit singles, this time around the group was navigating the departures of drummer Alan Leach and guitarist/keys player Joe Johnson.

Tim Wills (guitar/keys) and Rob Maxfield (drums) joined Rick, Paul and longstanding bassist Tom Gladwin, first for a run of live dates in 2022 that the band had booked prior to the pandemic, before they set about working on the new material. "We started seriously writing it in March 2022 and we'd completed the writing process by that Christmas," says Rick.

"For us to write an album in nine months is kind of unheard of, really, but it just felt like me and Paul hit a purple patch where everything that we were doing just seemed to be working, which was amazing because it doesn't usually happen like that."

The majority of the material on their last record was conceived with the band in the same room together, but this time around they took the tracks into the studio as fully-formed ideas, ready to be fleshed-out with producer Youth.

"If a song stands up on an acoustic guitar or on piano, you know you're onto something," says Paul. "So that's how we took a lot of it into the studio, which in itself was really exciting because that's when [the songs] really found their way." With their demos in tow - fleshed out remotely by the remaining band members from their respective homes - Shed Seven reconvened at Youth's Space Mountain studio in Spain, a remote hillside enclave surrounded by packs of stray dogs (one of whom, Mr. Scruff, appears on the 'A Matter Of Time' cover).

The producer's working methods came as no surprise to the band. "We knew what we were letting ourselves in for, because we'd worked with him before and he's really hard work," laughs Paul. "So we were in the studio for two and a half weeks - some bands go in for three months - and we'd start each day with me and Rick performing the song that we were doing that day on acoustic guitar, and he would help shape it before we took it into the live room setup as a band and played through it together, then did the overdubs. So we were really doing a song a day - there was no time to overthink anything, it was all about capturing moments of excitement."

Rick adds: "Youth is quite cantankerous; he's a bit of a musical genius and he's proved his worth over the years, yet he'd suggest things and we'd scratch our heads and think, 'What are you on about?' But then we'd try it and see the merit in it. And he questioned me on a daily basis. Lyrically, one day he might say to me, 'Why are you singing about love, man? That's so 1960s...', but then three days later, he'd say, 'Why don't you sing more about love?'

"So everyday was like an exam and it was very hard work - but I think it *has* to be hard work, because nothing comes easy in this life."

> THERE WAS NO TIME TO OVERTHINK ANYTHING, IT WAS ALL ABOUT CAPTURING MOMENTS OF EXCITEMENT
>
> **PAUL**

CHANGES

The collection of songs that forms 'A Matter Of Time' flies out of the traps and ends in an autumnal, reflective mood, and along the way, guests including the Libertines' Peter Doherty, Rowetta from Happy Mondays, and Reverend and the Makers' Laura McClure lend their talents to the offering.

Doherty features on album closer

> WE THOUGHT AT ONE POINT, MAYBE 1992, THAT WE WERE THE ONLY BAND IN THE COUNTRY WITH A GUITAR
>
> **RICK**

SO THE FUTURE HAS OPENED UP MASSIVELY FOR US IN SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS...
RICK

Throwaways, the final song to be recorded on the LP, billed by the band as an anthem for "people who don't fit". When the Sheds singer approached the Libertine to join him on it, he was amazed to find out he was a fan of the group and had learned the band's songs when he was learning to play guitar. McClure's presence on the dramatic *Tripping With You* came about after the band sought a similar presence to Kirsty MacColl in The Pogues' classic *Fairytale Of New York*, while Rowetta's involvement in the giddily euphoric *In Ecstasy* was an easy sell and led to the star-studded line-up on the album.

"As soon as I started singing the chorus melody, I just thought of her - it sounds so much like something she would have done with the Mondays," beams Rick. "When I eventually came up with the lyrics, it seemed to fit with that early-'90s sound that she was caught up in, so we decided we'd reach out to see if she was interested in joining in, and she listened to it and said she'd love to!

"Weirdly, what you hear on the end product is exactly how I heard it in my head when it first started to come to fruition, so it was great to get her involved and then that led on to inviting others onto the record, because why stop there?"

Are there plans for more collaborations going forward?

"There's a couple of people that have been mentioned," teases Paul, who floats Sophie Ellis-Bextor as a potential collaborator, while Rick says Simple Minds guitarist Charlie Burchill would make a neat addition to the pack. "We've gone down this route and it's worked so well," adds the singer. "So the future has opened up massively for us in so many different ways..."

There's a refreshing confidence within the band that shines through their latest body of work, which stands out as the product of their rise to the top, separation and a return that saw them re-embraced by fans whose lives their songs have soundtracked from the mid-1990s until now. Emerging in a climate that produced icons of the time like Blur and Oasis, Rick maintains it was their love of music that compelled them in the first place. "We thought at one point, maybe 1992, that we were the only band in the country with a guitar," he laughs. "It was all rave culture and the dance scene, but we were really into indie music and we honestly thought we were keeping the guitar going! Of course, we soon found out there were others and all of these people merged together, which is when it became known as what it was, but it was an exciting time."

ECSTASY

In the three decades since the band started out, the face of the music industry has changed beyond recognition and looking back at their formative years, there's a relief within the group that they launched in the era that they did.

"Sometimes I think back to getting signed compared to what it must be like now - I mean, it was literally someone from Polydor Records who heard a demo tape, came and watched us do a gig... and then another gig... and another," says Paul. "The funny thing was, our manager at the time said, 'Someone from Polydor wants to watch you do a gig, but it has to be in London', so we organised a gig in London, took a coach down with 50 people from York, and nothing happened. The next week, we had to do it again and there were 30 people on the coach, and that carried on for about eight weeks until we ended up doing a gig with about three people from York and this A&R guy! That's how we got signed, but at the time it was just normal - I don't know it would happen like that now, it would be all about social media."

> "IF A SONG STANDS UP ON AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR OR ON PIANO, YOU KNOW YOU'RE ONTO SOMETHING"
>
> **PAUL**

The band put in the work which, according to Rick, made it feel a little bit sweeter when things first started to change". He recalls: "We started to get recognised in service stations but it all seemed natural, like it was meant to be, because me and Paul had been doing stuff together since we were very young kids and it's all we ever wanted to do. It's a weird thing to say, because the music industry is very fickle and it's a very difficult thing to get into, so to have a career that we've had for so long is pretty amazing, really."

They may have become masters of their trade, but among the various perks that life in the music industry brings it's the connection with fans that remains the most fulfilling. Rick smiles: "For me, there's nothing better than walking out onto a stage with a few thousand people standing there looking like they're having the best time of their lives - you just feed off each other. We're very lucky as a band to have a great fan base that seems to be growing all the time. They know we're good at playing live, so it doesn't matter if it's Saturday night in London or Monday night in a rainy Blackburn, the atmosphere within that venue is always the same and that to me is the biggest buzz."

It's hardly surprising, then, that in the year the sees Shed Seven mark three decades of their debut album the band are in the running for their first chart-topping LP with 'A Matter Of Time'. "It's a dream - and it's looking like we've got a real shot at it," Paul grins. Rick adds: "We've had so many songs out there and I think the highest in the charts we've been is No. 7 - which is kind of apt - but to get to the 30th anniversary since the debut album came out, and in the very first week of that 30th anniversary year to be releasing a brand new set of songs, is brilliant in itself.

"For us to get our highest chart entry ever, at this point, is just amazing. So I don't even think we should even consider looking at the No. 1, I wouldn't want to get over excited about it, but if it does happen we'll tell the world!" **RP**

● ***'A Matter Of Time' is out now on Cooking Vinyl.***

PHOTOS DEAN CHALKLEY / CATHERINE McGANN / DERRICK SANTINI

TEARS on the DANCE FLOOR

On her sixth album, 'The Glorification of Sadness', **Paloma Faith** leans into a period of personal turbulence for a bold celebration of her experiences as a single mother and a pop superstar.

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

When Paloma Faith launched into the pop charts 15 years ago she was no stranger to the spotlight. The multi-hyphenate first made a name for herself as Andrea, the Emo, in the 2007 movie 'St. Trinians', with the film launching around the time she was scouted by an A&R man from Epic Records, who invited her to sing for the manager of the label.

A less-than-ideal introduction it may have been - when she asked him to turn off his phone, he refused and she walked out - her bold act left a lasting impression and she was later offered a deal, launching one of the most successful British pop careers in recent history.

MIRROR TO MIRROR

Now, six albums into her unravelling legacy, her act is far from toned down; launching into her latest era with the defiant *How You Leave A Man*, her zero-tolerance barn-burner about not sticking with the monotony and neglect of domesticity encompasses that early attention-grabbing attitude for a belter of a pop anthem.

"*How You Leave A Man* is meant to be empowering," she adds of its deeper meaning. "It's about taking control and

> ***In this album, I'm trying to pull it in the direction of it being OK to take ownership of your own happiness and not be a victim***

People don't like anyone who makes them think they're maybe partly to blame for their own unhappiness

responsibility for your own happiness as a woman. And not listening to the din of social pressures saying: you're only accepted as a woman if you're a victim. There's no room for a woman to say: actually, I just wasn't really happy. It's not really seen as acceptable, especially when there's kids involved.

"You're just a bad mother, selfish or whatever. So in this album, I'm trying to pull it in the direction of it being OK to take ownership of your own happiness and not be a victim. Re-establishing ideas of how we demonise women."

The track is the first to be lifted from 'The Glorification Of Sadness' and Paloma's first release since she split from her partner of nine years and father to her two children, following the release of her 2020 LP, 'Infinite Things'. In the time since, she fronted the BBC documentary, 'As I Am', showcasing the challenges of being a single mother and a pop star, including the public assumption that the split must be her fault, or that she should have tolerated misery for the sake of her kids, and the realisation that just because you leave in search of greater happiness doesn't mean you'll find it quickly.

One thing she has maintained, however, is control; after she completed 'Infinite Things' by learning how to self-produce in her basement during the pandemic, Paloma is billed on her latest LP as executive producer, having meticulously tweaked mixes, orchestrated the writing teams and co-curated the album's visual world. So while the documentary showed her previous creative struggles with her label, this time she made the record privately, inspired by her earliest musical experiences in a rock band, and delivered the completed product, to the surprise of her team. "It sounds how I wanted it to sound," she says. "My note, most of the time, was either 'angrier' or 'darker'."

She may have had definite ideas along the way, but when it comes to the title, 'The Glorification Of Sadness' points to her ambivalence about a culture in which "there's quite a sick and twisted call for any artist to turn the most awful things that happened to them into a commodity". She adds: "It's a strange idea, to sell your own grieving process. Writing about it was a therapeutic experience for me but at the same time now that I'm left with this object for sale, it is a bit sinister."

> ***"There's quite a sick and twisted call for any artist to turn the most awful things that happened to them into a commodity"***

BAD WOMAN

Over five albums, Paloma has never shied away from tackling subjects close to home. She described her debut album, 'Do You Want The Truth Or Something Beautiful?' (2009) as being about "the human condition, the constant striving for love and companionship", while her fourth album, 'The Architect' (2017), is about "motherhood and wanting to change things for a better future".

This time around, she felt she had no choice but to write about her experiences - "because it's all I think about". Compelled by the nuanced television adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's 'Scenes From A Marriage', Paloma also wanted to counter the prevailing societal concept of victims and villains in the breakdown of a relationship.

In the striking video for *How You Leave A Man* - conceived by Paloma and creative director, Theo Adams - she is seen walking out on an unseen man then "decadently sprawling all over the car bonnet". "Then I land back in the driver's seat and the camera pans across to two children sitting in the back, and they say: 'Can we go home now, mummy?' I'm trying to make this big statement about women that's so complex, words don't even do it justice," she reflects of the clip which, much like the rest of the visuals for the album, doesn't feature a man at all.

"The overarching theme is about a woman's personal internal journey and experience of life," she says. "Quite often people make breakups about two individuals: what was his side? But in a psychological sense it's not really ever about who did and said what because you can survive anything if you choose to, maybe you just choose not to."

It's that mindset and empowering perspective that's made Paloma such an appealing figure for women who find solace in her unadulterated honesty as she shares her candid experiences of birth, babies, postnatal depression and the challenges of having your basic needs met as a woman and mother expected to sacrifice herself over everyone else. In the past, she wanted to "achieve global success on a large scale, like Adele or Beyoncé," she says, but now: "I'm really happy with what I've got now because it's allowed me to make a work-life balance for my children, and while I get recognised, I have people approaching me in a really nice way because they've seen stuff I've said and they want to speak candidly and intelligently about those subjects. Particularly after the documentary I had a lot of women approaching me in the street, and sometimes they get quite emotional."

ENJOY YOURSELF

Alongside writing tracks for her sixth studio album, Paloma is in the final stages of writing a book about her experiences and her aims for the feminist movement, a process as meaningful to her on a personal level as it is to others in raising awareness about the reality of women's lives.

"It makes me feel less alone," she admits. "We live in this very separate society now because of the internet, dating apps, Chat GPT, the illusion of community online. How many times do we actually truly engage with each other? It adds another wall between us. Friends I've had for 20 years have said to me recently: why don't you just call us when you're not feeling good? And I don't know how to. I've forgotten how to." ▶

That theme runs across 'The Glorification Of Sadness'; the idea that brokenness is a facet of humanity to be celebrated and interrogated, not smoothed over by technology, feeding back to the situation she found herself in back in 2022, when she embarked on a huge tour in the wake of the end of her relationship and the deaths of five friends, including her beloved bandmate, BB Bones.

"All that makes you go inside yourself," she says. "I think a lot of people had the same experiences post-pandemic. I didn't feel that during the pandemic I was that affected by it. But afterwards I think we realised that we were. We're in the middle of a depression historically where lots of things feel unstable. Environmental issues, political issues, community-based issues, there's less money for everything. It's all imbalanced."

If the global situation could have led to the building of a better society, it didn't, instead reinforcing a wave of resentment that the government conveniently aims at marginalised groups such as refugees and trans people. "A lot of the anger is so misdirected – what's the problem if someone wants to transition? Leave them alone," Paloma insists. "If you're angry with your own life, fine, but it's not really any of your business. People don't like anyone who makes them think they're maybe partly to blame for their own unhappiness because they're too scared to do anything about it, so they're just going to hate anyone who takes responsibility for theirs."

Her reluctance to stay quiet and a drive to position herself at the fore of key conversations, both personally and via her music, which often marries lavish, skyscraping pop fantasy with funny, plainspoken practicality, is undeniably integral to her enduring success. "I'm a female artist that began at a time where female artists' careers didn't really last," Paloma says. "There's very few of my original female peers that still have a career."

There are two recent mirrors to her attitude towards longevity: Doja Cat's victorious track, *Demons*, and Madonna's declaration: "The most controversial thing I've ever done is to stick around." Paloma cried when she came across it. "I just found it so unbelievably moving. I felt seen".

Earlier this year, she visited Ukrainian refugees in Poland to learn about the experiences of young mothers fleeing the war and when she performed at King Charles' coronation concert in May, she was determined to do so in an authentic way. "I've come up through the British system, the NHS, state schooling," she says. "I think it's important that working-class people like me are represented in those situations. And I was helped by Charles' Prince's Trust charity when I was a kid because I was from a low-income household, so it felt respectful to do it. A large part of opportunity for underprivileged artists and creatives has come from that charity, which is really important – otherwise all creativity would be ruled by people from privileged backgrounds."

And to the preshow, she wore a Vivienne Westwood T-shirt emblazoned with "CLIMATE" to foreground the environmental crisis and acknowledge Charles' work on environmentalism. She adds: "I feel when you're given an opportunity, you should take it because otherwise change doesn't happen." **RP**

● ***'The Glorification Of Sadness' is out February 16 on Sony.***

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

"We live in this very separate society now because of the internet, dating apps, Chat GPT, the illusion of community online"

Reach for the lasers

Thirty-five years after they first formed, **EMF** return this month, reuniting with their original producer for a brand new album and UK tour!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

EMF (l-r): Stevey Marsh, Adrian Todd, James Atkin, Derry Brownson, Ian Dench

EMF's rise to the top of the charts back in the early 1990s was... *Unbelievable*!

The Gloucestershire group formed in '89 and scored a major breakthrough the following year when their debut single launched into the Top 3 of the UK charts and hit No. 1 on the US Billboard Hot 100 the following year, spearheading a run of hit records across three albums.

Mid-way through the decade, they went their separate ways, but having reformed sporadically over the years that followed, it was the 30th anniversary of their international success that saw the group, led by singer James Atkin and guitarist Ian Dench, get back on track and after an understated return to the studio in 2022, they're back this month, reunited with original producer Ralph Jezzard, on the band's fifth LP, 'The Beauty And The Chaos'.

21ST CENTURY

"With 'Go Go Sapiens' (2022), we wrote it and produced it ourselves and just put it out," recalls Ian, "then it just started snowballing, more people were coming to the shows and we thought, 'Well, let's do some more songs...'"

As the sessions progressed, they decided to reach out and reconnect with Jezzard, who previously helmed *Unbelievable* and the majority of their first two albums, 'Schubert Dip' (1991) and 'Stigma' (1992). Over the years they'd stayed in touch, but in another instance of serendipity it soon turned out the hitmaker - who had relocated to the US in the time between them last working together - was back in Blighty.

"Talk about the stars aligning," laughs Ian. "He'd been in Texas and I'd been over to see him a couple of times. But he moved back to London and he was literally living around the corner from my studio, so everything just happened naturally."

Clocking in at 10 tracks, the LP finds the band at their full creative tilt for a soundscape that's instantly recognisable to fans of their earlier output, with a confidence that comes with three decades of history. "I think James and I have solidified into our roles," Ian reflects. "James loves techno music, he loves electronics, and he often starts demos off with a groove. I'm the punk-pop-blues guitarist and I always want to smash out some guitar riffs. When we combine those things, that's when it gets exciting and I love that dynamic. That's the thing that defines the EMF sound."

Look no further than the lead track, *Hello People*, and the parallels appear; while their first hit contained samples of US comedian Andrew Dice Clay and a Black Panther Party member shouting "What the fuck?", a remix of the new tune includes Stephen Fry quoting from his myth busting video, Facts vs Fear. And Ralph's involvement in the project only helped reinforce their vision. "He's an old punk but he also loves electronic music, so it's a real love triangle between James, Ralph and I," adds the musician.

> **WHEN WE WERE YOUNGER, I THINK THE PRESSURE GOT TO US A LOT**

"It's funny, because Ralph came in with this idea to use this amazing programme called Superior Drummer 3, which has drums recorded in all the greatest studios in the world. There's this one particularly amazing sounding kit from Hansa Studios in Berlin, where Iggy Pop did some of his recordings, and I was a bit sceptical at first but it turned out really great, because it really gave us control.

"Our drummer is amazing and he played the electronic drum kit with all the finesse that he would play on an organic drum kit, but we could change the drum sounds and we managed to mix all those things together in a

> **IT'S FUNNY TO THINK THAT WE WERE PINNED UP ON SOME PEOPLE'S WALLS**

beautiful way that would have been such a struggle 30 years ago," he laughs. "Oh my God, the drama in the studio because bits of electronic equipment wouldn't work - I guess bands like us and the Happy Mondays were sort of at the frontier of mixing those electronic elements with the organic instruments, but if one thing went wrong suddenly everything would melt down and you'd lose five hours in the studio trying to sort it all out. It was such a nightmare! Now, the technology is amazing and you can work everything out on a laptop."

STARDUST

Prior to forming EMF, all five original members were veterans of the local music scene before coming together with a name that was supposedly short for Epsom Mad Funkers (although many thought it was actually Ecstasy Mother Fuckers). Within two months, they played their first live show and the band remained active for five years, releasing hits such as the UK Top 20 singles *I Believe*, *Children* and *I'm A Believer*, and touring the world.

"When you get older, you look back at your life and think, 'Oh, what was the good stuff?', and EMF definitely was the good stuff," Ian smiles. "We had such a good time and now, to be able to do that without the difficult things from back in the day... When we were younger, I think the pressure got to us a lot, and there

LA BOULISTERIE
Club
BAR À BOULES
NICE - FRANCE
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was a real pressure to keep hitting goals, which sort of weighs on you. Whereas now we do it because we want to make music together and release it at a level where it makes financial sense - so that we sell enough to cover the costs - but it's still wonderful."

Ian and James appear in the current line-up with original keys player and sample man, Derry Brownson, and two new musicians: Stevey Marsh (bass) and Adrian Todd (drums). And it's not just the line-up that's different. "There's no Jack Daniels on the rider," he laughs. "It's oat milk and vegan snacks! But now we're a little bit older, we just enjoy each other's company, we love playing, and we love being with the fans. And the fans have grown up with us, so it's lovely seeing those people and feeling that sense of community. What can I say? I feel like it's better than it was back in the day when we were younger and the pressures were kind of getting to us..."

PHOTOS SIMON DRAKE

On the back of a hit like *Unbelievable*, it's the record companies you'd expect to pile on the pressure, but Ian says the band themselves were their biggest critics as they constantly sought to match the dizzying heights of their debut. "I have tried to write *Unbelievable* again. I'd love to write *Unbelievable* again, wouldn't we all?!" he declares. "But when you try to do it, and you don't do it, you think, 'What's wrong with me? Why isn't this happening?', and eventually you have to resign yourself to the fact that there was just something about it and the stars just aligned. It was a moment - and thank goodness for that moment, we're all so lucky to have had that moment. But we also made three albums and we wrote a lot of other great tunes."

Ahead of their UK tour, which launches later this month and plays through February, and with new music to bring to the arena, the passing of time has seen the boys cut themselves some slack. "This is our fifth album, we love writing together, I still think we write great tunes, and I've relieved myself of the responsibility of writing another *Unbelievable*," insists the hitmaker who, following the band's split, went on to write for some of the biggest names in pop. "We just love writing songs together and long may that continue, but I also think that writing hits for other people was a good way to exorcise the ghost of *Unbelievable*. It was like, 'I *can* write another hit song'. Now, I've given up trying to write hit songs and I just do what I love. The stars aligning is something that's out of your control, but the more you put yourself out there doing things you love, the more chance there is of them aligning again."

> **POP IS ABOUT CONNECTION AND I FIND THAT INCREDIBLY AUTHENTIC - IT'S A BEAUTIFUL THING**

DO IT AGAIN

Listen to any of EMF's recordings and you'd be surprised to hear one of their primary songwriters went on to pen pop gems like *Beautiful Liar* for Beyoncé and Shakira, or Jordin Sparks' *Tattoo*. It's even more interesting, then, that his first band was a punk band - and he was so embedded in that world that, when he first discovered Cream, he kept the records a secret from his bandmates because he was embarrassed.

It broadened his horizons. "I just started loving songs because I connected with them, then there was the whole post-punk thing and bands like Soft Cell and Eurythmics, and when things became more pop-y I realised I loved pop," Ian admits. "Pop is about connection and I find that incredibly authentic - it's a beautiful thing. I know some people say, 'Oh, you're selling out', especially when you have a big song, but I think when you connect with people, that's when you make great music and that's what pop is. What makes music connect with people? What are the musical and lyrical elements? How do you find those? I guess that's what I've been searching for my whole musical life - trying to find things that makes people go, 'Wow, that's exciting!'"

> **WRITING HITS FOR OTHER PEOPLE WAS A GOOD WAY TO EXORCISE THE GHOST OF *UNBELIEVABLE***

When it came down to the EMF formula, it was more a case of "throwing it on the wall and hoping it sticks". "We loved all those English guitar bands like The Smiths and Echo And The Bunnymen, but then we heard hip-hop coming in from America, like De La Soul, Public Enemy and Cypress Hill," he adds. "We weren't the only people trying to put those two things together... but I think it came from that punk ethos."

That may have been their mindset, but after blowing up EMF became self-professed "pinups" and darlings of the Smash Hits world. "Listen, we rode that to some extent, because that was the glory of pop stardom," Ian chuckles. "It's funny to think that we were pinned up on some people's walls... but now those people have grown older and when they come to the shows, they say, 'I was 12 when I heard *Unbelievable* and I grew up with you' - and now they're coming along to see us with their teenage kids, which is lovely to see!"

With the album and tour both launching this month, EMF's 2024 schedule is off to a flying start and although Ian insists they have "no expectations", when it comes to the rest of the year the world is theirs for the taking. "There was talk about going to Japan, which my wife was really excited about because when I first met her, 30 years ago, I took her there on tour," he teases. "When we went to Germany in September that was fun, but we've all got families so we're really just focussing on keeping things ticking over and bringing the music out there for people to enjoy." **RP**

● ***'The Beauty And The Chaos' is out January 19 on EMF Recordings. Their UK tour kicks off the same day in Bristol.***

BATTLE BORN

Having recently returned to music with her powerful single *Silence*, lifted from the upcoming EP 'Warpaint', **Sandi Thom** reveals why she's turning to Web3 for the next chapter in her career!

WORDS CONNOR GOTTO

Back in 2006, Sandi Thom's rise from obscurity to the top of the global charts with *I Wish I Was A Punk Rocker (With Flowers In My Hair)* was the stuff of pop legend.

The Scottish singer-songwriter went global with her pioneering virtual concert series that attracted over 70,000 viewers and landed her with a No. 1 single and album.

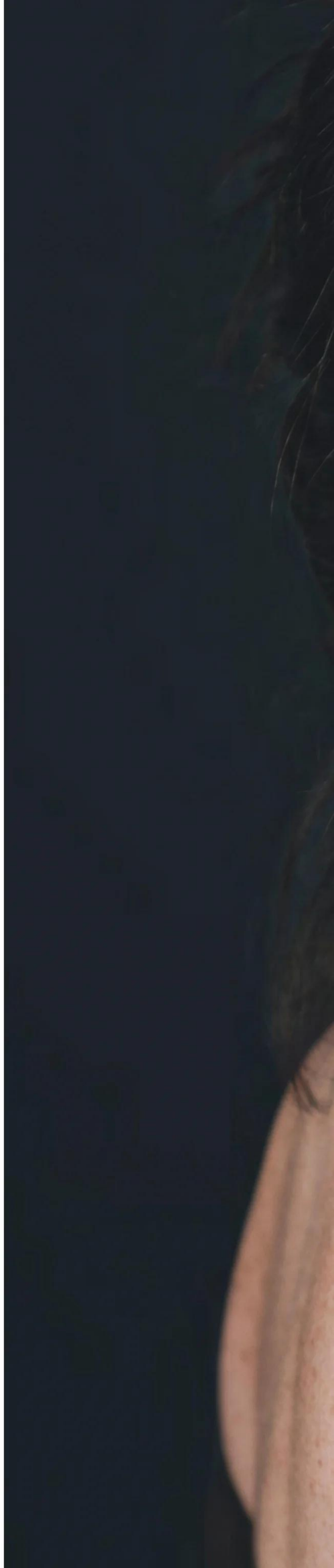
Having recently returned to music with the stunning new single, *Silence* - the first release from her upcoming EP, 'Warpaint' - she's heading into this year with another new track that leans into the past, described by the hitmaker as "the more mature cousin of *Punk Rocker*"...

RISE AS ONE

"It's called *Festival Of The Oppressed*, which is taken from a Germaine Greer book," says Sandi. "The line is 'revolution is the festival of the oppressed' and there's probably going to be a lot of discussion, predominantly within the UK, because it really reflects a lot of the political, social and economical struggles of the past few years. You know: Brexit, the Tories, Suella Braverman - it name-drops all those people and things."

Much like she took to the Internet back in the mid-2000s to launch her career, this time around Sandi's inked a deal with Gala - a Web3 company that is "transforming music from a low valued, streamed commodity, into an interactive, unique and reward-generating experience" - to release her latest material. For the artist, it's a no-brainer: "I'm someone that's been known for talking quite openly about the industry and how there's a lot of bureaucracy and red tape, like any kind of giant corporation, and as someone who has run an independent label for over a decade, you're not going to get the same outcome as major label artists with the old model of promotion. But the metaverse is revolutionising the music industry, so we're putting out a song about revolution in a space that is revolutionary. And it's very controversial. But I'm not doing things by the book."

Several big name artists, including Snoop Dogg and Kings Of Leon,



> **THE METAVERSE IS REVOLUTIONISING THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, SO WE'RE PUTTING OUT A SONG ABOUT REVOLUTION IN A SPACE THAT IS REVOLUTIONARY**

already work with Gala, but Sandi is the first well-known British singer to sign with the company and kick started that relationship last year with the charity track *Silence*.

"Anything it makes is being donated to Motley Zoo, which is an animal rescue charity, but it's already had more visibility and organic growth on the Gala page than it has on Spotify, so you can see where things are headed."

Her determination to keep pushing forward with new means of sharing her music was originally the product of a wider problem experienced by unsigned and independent artists: how to get mass exposure without the cost. Running from February 24 to March 16, 2006, '21 Nights From Tooting' consisted of 21 performances from the basement of her London flat, which attracted massive media attention and, come the final shows, huge global audiences.

"We didn't have the money to just throw a budget and hope that it sticks, so we had to do things that caught people's eyes and were different," she shrugs, "and different isn't always received well. But different is progress and different is what changes things, so I've always been this kind of rebel with a cause, and a little bit of an outlaw..."

Originally released to little fanfare in 2005, *Punk Rocker* was reissued the following year and debuted at No. 1 on the UK Singles Chart, and reached the same peak in Ireland, Scotland and Australia, where it was the best-selling single of 2006. Its parent album, 'Smile... It Confuses People', arrived on RCA later that year and also peaked atop the UK Albums Chart, but when follow-up single *What If I'm Right* missed the Top 20 and *Lonely Girl* didn't chart, the label had different ideas of how her next album should sound.

REMOTE CONTROL ME

"The only time I ever really conformed or did anything that was like 'cookie-cutter pop' was when I did 'The Pink And The Lily' (2008)," Sandi admits of her sophomore record, featuring the single *The Devil's Beat*. "That was through Sony and we went by the book." She tried to inject some of the

"WE DIDN'T HAVE THE MONEY TO JUST THROW A BUDGET AND HOPE THAT IT STICKS, SO WE HAD TO DO THINGS THAT CAUGHT PEOPLE'S EYES AND WERE DIFFERENT"

personality of her previous recordings into the lyrics but the record company, she says, was having none of it.

"There's a song on there called *Saturday Night* but what you hear isn't the original lyric. The original lyric talked about throwing up out of cabs and had Cockney slang in it, all sorts of stuff, but the label rejected it because they thought it was too risqué," she sighs. "It was the second single and I wanted to make a video for it, but they said 'no' and I ended up doing one in my kitchen, with my now-ex in the background making dinner, as a revolt against them."

There are songs on the record she still likes. "But they were the songs that never got any promotion. I wanted to put them out but it was always a fight with Sony because, 'No, they're not pop-y enough, not commercial enough'. So they just became album fillers."

After exiting the label, Sandi started her own company, Guardian Angels, for her 2010 album, 'Merchants And Thieves'; a bold move towards blues and roots, led by the storming single, *This Ol' World*, with Joe Bonamassa. "That was probably a bit of a purge

“IT’S QUITE DIFFICULT TO GO FROM BEING FERRIED AROUND IN ADDISON LEE CARS ALL DAY LONG TO, ALL OF A SUDDEN, IT BEING LIKE, ‘SEE YA’”

as well, because it’s quite difficult to go from being ferried around in Addison Lee cars all day long to, all of a sudden, it being like, ‘See ya’,” Sandi reflects. “It was brutal, but when that happened a lot of artists got cut because of the way the industry had turned and the big labels hadn’t really gotten in front with the digital shift, so they were really suffering financially.

“But I carried on and I still did a lot of things in between that weren’t necessarily making headline news, but in their own way they were quite trailblazing. When I set up my own label out in LA and I did the deal with Fontana, the original distribution company that I worked with, I had no sales history, I had nothing to show and no way to prove I could make money, but they still gave me a deal.”

She adds: “Ironically, now I distribute through The Orchard, which was bought by Sony, and it’s hilarious because I, as an artist on Sony, would get 20 per cent of the lion’s share, but as an independent label on The Orchard I get 80 per cent. So the tables are turned.”

Four years later, she reemerged with what’s without doubt her most accomplished work to date, ‘Flesh And Blood’ (2012), recorded in Nashville’s 16 Ton Studios and featuring The Black Crowes guitarist Rich Robinson as guest producer, and other musicians such as Audley Freed, Rolling Stones saxophonist Bobby Keys, and singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie. “I remember some person in Nashville said to me, ‘Hey, do you know Rich Robinson?’ I was like, ‘No’, and they said, ‘He wants to get into production, maybe you should talk to him’,” she recalls. “So he set me up with a meeting, I played some demos and he was like, ‘Yeah, let’s do it’. So off we went to Nashville. And it’s probably the most ‘real’ album I’ve ever made; it was done in a real classic way, in terms of the recording processes - nothing was digital, it was all organic and raw and analogue.

“He also really pushed me as a singer, because in the beginning my then-manager always told me not to oversing and to service the song, but on that album I thought, ‘No, you know what, I’m gonna belt things out on this

“I DIDN’T FEEL THAT PEOPLE NECESSARILY KNEW WHAT I WAS CAPABLE OF”

PHOTOS KIRSTEN McTERNAN

> **TO DEAL WITH THAT KIND OF CHAOS YOU NEED TO BE SUPER CALM AND ALWAYS ABLE TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO CATASTROPHIC PROBLEMS**

occasion', because I also didn't feel that people necessarily knew what I was capable of."

THE HUMAN JUKEBOX

In 2013, Sandi released 'The Covers Collection', featuring stripped-back renditions of classics such as Heart's *Alone*, Joni Mitchell's *River* and Fleetwood Mac's *Songbird*, plus her version of Guns N' Roses' *November Rain*, which has close to two million Spotify streams and over 13 million views on YouTube. A decade later, she's plotting a sequel to the record: "I'm working on Metallica's *Nothing Else Matters* at the moment," she reveals.

Two years later, she released *Earthquake* as the lead single from her planned sixth LP, 'Weapons Of Past Destruction', a project that later came to fruition as 2019's 'Ghosts', after her brother urged her to change the title, and in the between period she relocated to Bahrain, Middle East. "That wasn't planned, but my son's dad's work was there and I was a new mum, so that was my priority," she says of welcoming Logan, now seven.

While out there, she became heavily involved in rescuing stray dogs, with music taking a backseat as Sandi increased her philanthropic efforts within the animal world. "I just became this person that everybody went to to solve all the problems of the country's stray dog population," she muses. "There was a shelter with 500 to 600 animals and it was just crazy; the heat, the conditions, the poverty, the lack of any kind of animal rights. It felt like everything was against you but it just swept me up for years and I completely parked my career for it."

Having recently returned to the UK, music is back in Sandi's sights, and she says that although the experience enriched her on a personal level, she had no choice but to step back. "I always remember this one vet said to me, 'The only way you can get out of this is if you physically leave' - and in the end, he was right, and we left."

Now, those years are revisited in her most recent music; *Silence* bears several references to her time in the desert and the title song from 'Warpaint' speaks of her tenure in the Middle East. "It changed me a lot as a person," she adds. "And also, I think it proved to me my capacity for resilience, because to deal with that kind of chaos you need to be super calm and always able to find solutions to catastrophic problems, which is what it was like being at the forefront of that animal rescue community."

Looking to the year ahead, Sandi will return to the live circuit over the summer for a handful of shows, but plans to keep performing to a minimum while she raises her son, instead focussing on releasing new material and tapping into the ethos that made her a household name 18 years ago.

"Sometimes with music, what's right in your face is watered down because the powers that be don't want [protest] songs to make waves, right?" she offers. "So that's why I'm putting these new songs out on Web3, because the NFT lives on the blockchain in perpetuity, it's end-to-end encrypted, and there's nothing you can do to take it off, so it's going to be there forever. There is no media outlet, no radio station, nothing that's going to be able to pull that stuff down!" **RP**

● ***Festival Of The Oppressed is out January 24. 'Warpaint' is out soon.***

INTRODUCING...

BRYN CHRISTOPHER

Sixteen years after he released his debut album, **Bryn Christopher** is back and introducing his music to a new generation of fans!

Singer-songwriter Bryn Christopher is no stranger to the pop world, but after a decade penning bops for acts including The Saturdays and Alexandra Burke, this year he's finally stepping back into the spotlight.

"I'm just desperate to sing and release music," he laughs, "without the stress of, 'Oh, it needs to be Top 5' or anything like that. Last year, I did an acoustic thing and it was the best few days. I think I just want some attention!"

Throughout his career, Bryn has never shied away from putting himself out there; born in Great Barr, Birmingham, he attended the Italia Conti Stage School in London and was a contestant on 'Popstars: The Rivals' back in 2002. "I was only there for two days and then I got chucked out," he admits. "Me and Nicola [Roberts, Girls Aloud star] were both 16 and we had to have our mums with us - there were about eight of us that were like the little kids!"

> Biff Stannard asked if I wanted to come down to Brighton for two days to work with Mel C and in my head I was like, 'Of course'

Of course, he didn't land a spot in winning boy band One True Voice, but Bryn continued to audition for various acts and eventually convinced industry folk in the city that he was hot property. "I lied to them and said, 'Oh, loads of people want to work with me, do you want to or not?' And then they did," he grins. "I did a couple of demos, left the school that I was at and luckily got signed to Polydor within a couple of months. Then, obviously, I was in the industry and working with some amazing songwriters, like Wayne Hector and Steve Mac, and I realised just how small the industry is - as long as you've got good friends that like you, you can work with them forever. I'm still working with Wayne now..."

The songwriting duo were behind Westlife's *Flying Without Wings* - "which I used to do at every school concert" - and Bryn was also starstruck when he found himself at dinner with Swedish producer and songwriter Rami Yacoub. Well, he would have been had he realised who he was: "I just thought he was some cool producer and it was only years later when I was looking at his credits that I realised, 'Oh my God, he's *that* guy!' He wrote *loads* of Britney Spears songs. I can't believe I had dinner with him and didn't even know..."

Someone he was more than prepared to meet was Melanie C; a few years ago, he was invited to write with the Spice Girl and their sessions produced *Who I Am*, the lead single from her eighth studio album. "Biff [Stannard, songwriter] asked if I wanted to come down to Brighton for two days to work with Mel C and in my head I was like, 'Of course I'd love to spend two days with her' - I didn't expect to get the first single," he admits. "To hear her sing the melody that I came up with was amazing, it was such a fun time."

Having been signed to a major label in the past, now he's enjoying life as part of a smaller machine that allows him the freedom to steer his ship and release the kind of music he wants to make. "I really enjoyed being in the major label world but there's freedom and not the same pressure [now]," he reflects. "When I was at Polydor, I had a Top 20 album and that was technically a failure. Now,

I'd be like, 'How is that a failure? That's mental!' I'd love to be in the Top 20 again, but a lot of my friends are on major labels and I know that sometimes they aren't allowed to release the songs they want or they aren't actually working towards an album. So yeah, I really enjoyed my time, but I think independents are just as good."

With that in mind, his sights are set firmly on the next 12 months - when we chat in December, he frequently reminds himself that it is, in fact, still 2023 - and having enjoyed dance collaborations with Sigala (*Sweet Lovin'*) and Felix Jaehn (*No Therapy*) in recent years, he's planning to switch things up.

"I'm going to be releasing many more singles, some a little more acoustic," he teases. "I've got a song called *Because Of You* that I'm really excited to get out there that shows my voice off, with just violin and cello. I'll still be staying in the songwriting world, but it'll be fun to get back to releasing my own music."

Don't be surprised when you see his name popping up in the credits on other artists' albums too; a huge Eurovision fan, Bryn recently got to work with Loreen on a number of tracks, which he hopes will make it onto her hotly-anticipated new LP. "My friend was in with the guys that wrote *Tattoo* and he said, 'Do you want to come in and do some hooks?', and I said, 'OK, that's cool'," he shares. "Then a week and a half later, I got a text saying, 'Do you want to go in with Loreen next week for two days?' and oh my God, she's just everything. I'm obsessed with her. She's gorgeous, so lovely, just a beautiful human being. So we did a couple of songs and I think one of them is really good..."

Now, the sky's the limit. "Beyoncé would be a dream, obviously," he beams, "and Selena Gomez - I love her!" **RP**

● ***Watch out for more from Bryn Christopher throughout 2024 and check out his songwriter's version of Sigala and Ella Eyre's huge hit, Came Here For Love, out now.***

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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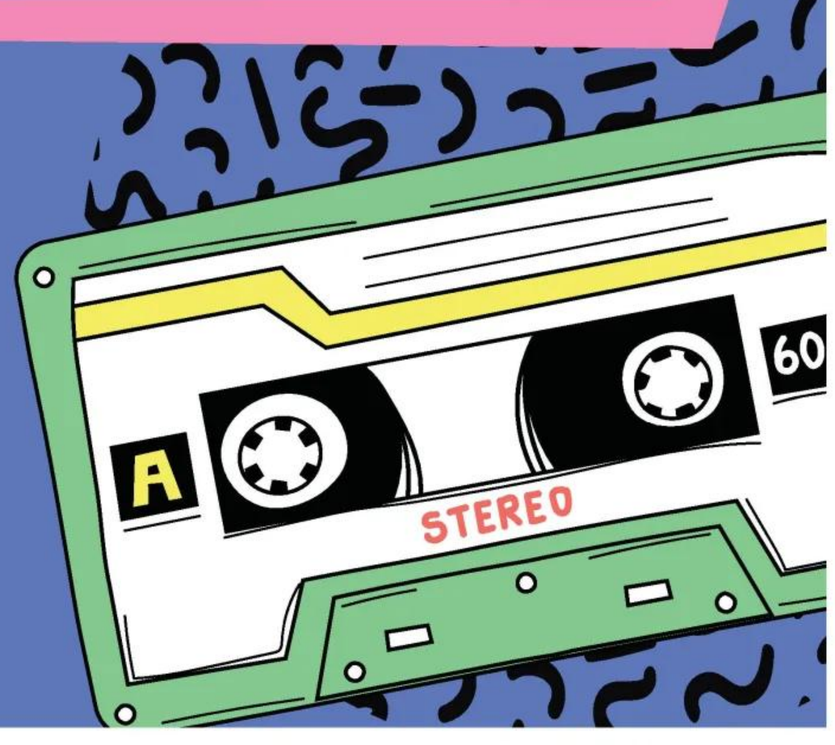

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Totally 90s

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

91

OVERCONFIDENCE

The Hoosiers' latest record receives the deluxe treatment

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

88 ALBUMS

Black Grape, EMF, Shed Seven

91 REISSUES

10cc, Belinda Carlisle, Busted, Cocteau Twins, Del Amitri, The Fray, Go West, The Hoosiers, Kiki Dee, Kirsty MacColl, Level 42, Paul McCartney & Wings

RATINGS EXPLAINED: ★★★★★ **BRILLIANT** ★★★★☆ **STRONG** ★★★☆☆ **GOOD** ★★☆☆☆ **AVERAGE** ★☆☆☆☆ **POOR**

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

SHED SEVEN
A MATTER OF TIME
★★★★☆

RELEASED: **January 5**
Cooking Vinyl
FORMATS: **CD, Deluxe CD, Live Edition CD, 1LP Dolphin Vinyl, 1LP Orange Vinyl, 1LP Pink Vinyl, 1LP White Vinyl, Pink/Green Cassette**

For years it seemed that Shed Seven would be another act whose flame burnt bright then went out in the Britpop heyday of the 1990s.

But following a surprise comeback with the Top 10 'Instant Pleasures', the band returns with their superb sixth album, 'A Matter Of Time', and a body of work that stands out among the best of their 30-year career.

"For this album, we took a nostalgic journey back to our roots, immersing ourselves in the records and sounds that ignited our passion for songwriting at the tender age of 12," says guitarist Paul Banks. "The influences of bands like The Smiths, R.E.M., U2, Simple Minds, The Cure, and Duran Duran permeate every note, making it a heartfelt homage to those cherished times.

"It embodies the essence of rebirth, empowering individuals to embrace their true selves without inhibition. With utmost conviction, we declare this as the pinnacle of our musical endeavours – the record we've always yearned to create."

A broad spectrum of influences on paper makes for a varied listen, from the raucous *Talk Of The Town* to the breezy *Kissing California* and heart-tugging *Let's Go Dancing*, all of which showcase distinct facets of the band's sound with Rick Witter's heavy Yorkshire-accent a reassuring thread throughout.

Launching with the call to action *Let's Go* - an infectious pop-punk tinged ditty that wouldn't sound out of place on a Green Day album - 'A Matter Of Time' also marks the band's first foray into vocal collaborations, with Happy Mondays powerhouse Rowetta lending her unmistakable belt to *In Ecstasy* and Reverend and the Makers' Laura McClure adding a softness to the layered *Tripping With You*.

Reaching its pinnacle with the six-minute epic *Throwaways*, featuring Libertine Pete Doherty on vocals, the track builds to a soaring singalong anthem and an ode to those that society forgot, a reminder once more that it was only ever *'a matter of time'* until Shed Seven reemerged and cemented themselves as one of the finest and most enduring acts of the Britpop generation.

Without question their strongest, most assured work since 'A Maximum High' (1996).

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

EMF
THE BEAUTY AND THE CHAOS
★★★★☆

RELEASED: **January 19**
EMF Records
FORMATS: **CD, Deluxe CD, 1LP Yellow Vinyl**

Over three decades after they dominated the global charts with their breakout single, *Unbelievable*, EMF reunite with original producer, Ralph Jezzard, on 'The Beauty And The Chaos'.

Following their return to the studio with 2022's 'Go Go Sapiens', the new project sees the band revive their classic sound, fusing infectious grooves with full-throttle guitar and a driving energy that instantly captures the essence of the '90s.

There's a familiarity with lead single, *Hello People*, which sees the band partnered with Stephen Fry for its single mix. They first met in 1992 and collaborated on *Glass Smash Jack* for the 'Cha Cha Cha' (1995) album, with his involvement in the new tune driving home the band's longing for unity through music.

"The message of our new song *Hello People* is about tolerance," says the band. "Who better, then, to verify the facts and emotions about immigration in the face of a flood of hate speech than the most intellectually rigorous and entertaining brain in the world and our very own National Treasure the great Stephen Fry."

There's a sense of the group having one foot in the past throughout; not only are James Atkins' vocals largely unchanged from the band's heyday (an impressive feat in itself), but they also celebrate dance pioneers of decades gone by in the climactic middle eight of *Reach For The Lasers*.

It's a move not dissimilar to *that* iconic bridge in Madonna's *Vogue* and a pop reference one could expect from a songwriter such as Ian Dench, whose sensibilities have served acts such as Beyoncé and Shakira, and seep into the impressive tracklist, be it in the *Strut* of *I've Been Down*, synth-led *The Day The Music Died*, or new wave-leaning *Stardust*, from which the album title derives.

A pair of ballads pale in comparison with the rest of the record, though not enough to detract from the overall quality of an album that reaffirms EMF's place in the pop landscape and proves, even three decades later, they're still capable of delivering material to the standard of their classic recordings.

PHOTO SIMON DRAKE

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

BLACK GRAPE
ORANGE HEAD
★★★☆☆

RELEASED: **January 19**
DGAFF
FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Black Vinyl, 2LP Orange & Black Vinyl, 2LP Green & Black Vinyl**

Over the past three decades, Black Grape have been far from prolific with just three albums under their belt, but more than 30 years after their formation the act returns with a brand new record.

That's not to say there hasn't been activity from within the band in recent memory; headed up by Happy Mondays' Shaun Ryder and Ruthless Rap Assassin Paul 'Kermit' Leveridge, the former released his debut solo album in 2021 and will hit the road with the Mondays later this year.

Before then, he's back with Leveridge and a collection that holds up alongside their catalogue. "Black Grape has always been about pushing boundaries and defying expectations," says Ryder. "'Orange Head' is the next chapter in our musical journey, and it's packed with the energy and innovation that our fans have come to expect."

Opener *Button Eyes* is underpinned by a slinky drumbeat and Cuban brass, serving as an introduction to the classic Black Grape sound, with the tempo kept up and the grooves aplenty across the set.

That's not to say they don't play around with genres; *Panda* nods towards psychedelia, while *Sex On The Beach* leans heavily into dub and *Pimp Wars* offers a perky slice of funk.

But the idiosyncrasy makes sense within the context of the record, which is sequenced more as a DJ set, segueing through their multiple influences and showcasing a spectrum of sounds that make up their sonic universe.

Individually, there's little that strikes as an instant classic, but together 'Orange Head' is a strong showing from Ryder and Kermit and, 30 years since they first emerged, a welcome addition to the Black Grape catalogue that once again proves their creativity extends beyond the '90s.

PHOTO PAUL HUSBAND

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

KIRSTY MACCOLL
FREE WORLD: THE BEST OF KIRSTY MACCOLL 1979-2000
★★★★☆
RELEASED: **January 19 *Demon***
FORMATS: **2LP Yellow Vinyl**

Celebrating the very best of the late singer's recordings on a 2LP set, 'Free World' spans Kirsty MacColl's recorded catalogue from 1979 to her untimely 2000 death.

Between her June 1979 debut, *They Don't Know* and her final release in 2000, the singer-songwriter recorded five studio albums and 17 singles, all of which feature on this retrospective.

Primarily a showcase of her self-penned material and tracks produced in partnership with collaborators like Graham Gouldman and Johnny Marr, also included are her covers of The Kinks' *Days* and Billy Bragg's *A New England*.

Presented on two yellow vinyl discs, packaged with inner sleeves containing song information and original artwork from her albums and singles series, it's a fitting look back on her decades-spanning output.

Closing with her beloved Pogues holiday duet, *Fairytale Of New York*, it makes for an essential release for long time fans and new listeners alike.

THE HOOSIERS
OVERCONFIDENCE
★★★★☆
RELEASED: **January 19**
Crab Race
FORMATS: **Digital**

Back with an expanded edition of their latest album, The Hoosiers' 'Overconfidence' repackages the band's fifth LP with new original and live material.

The first album from Irwin Sparkes and Alan Sharland in eight years saw the duo revisit the sound of their classic debut while reflecting the position that the lifelong friends find themselves in today.

Alongside the original 11-song collection are the new, unreleased recordings - *Messing With My Feelings*, *Gung Ho* and *Mister Moon* - each of which represents a unique facet of their sound, along with performance versions of album cut *Making A Monster* and 'The Secret Service' (2015) song *Up To No Good*.

Of course the new material is a treat, but the joy of this set is the live material which sees the boys in their element, doing what they do best, and hints towards a full recording of their London show materialising at a later date.

Ahead of more live gigs throughout the year and beyond, it's a welcome nudge towards a strong return from the band and proof yet again that, over 16 years into their career, The Hoosiers are here to stay.

10CC
20 YEARS 1972-1992
★★★★★
RELEASED: **January 26 *Edsel***
FORMATS: **14CD Box Set**

All of 10cc's studio albums from 1972 to 1992, along with the double live album from 1977, 'Live And Let Live', are collected on the band's latest box set.

Formed in 1972, initially consisting Graham Gouldman, Eric Stewart, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, the group first charted in September 1972 with their '50s pastiche, *Donna* (No. 2), and six months later had their first No. 1 single with *Rubber Bullets*.

Between 1972 and 1978, 10cc had five consecutive UK Top 10 albums, with an additional 12 UK Top 30 singles, 10 of which reached the Top 10, whilst three hit the top spot, including *I'm Not In Love* and *Dreadlock Holiday*.

For this 145 track/14 disc celebration, their complete studio and live output is collected alongside two additional CDs of non-album tracks, including single edits, alternative mixes and non-album B-sides.

Packaged with a 10,000 word essay written by Liam Newton, author of the band's official autobiography, 'The Worst Band In The World', it's a fittingly comprehensive celebration of a British pop institution.

RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | **REISSUES** | COMPILATIONS

LEVEL 42
STANDING IN THE LIGHT
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **January 19 *Proper***
FORMATS: **1LP Gold Vinyl**

'Standing In The Light', the third album by Level 42, is available again on LP as a limited audiophile 180g gold vinyl pressing.

Originally released in 1983, the record saw bassist and vocalist Mark King, keyboard player/vocalist Mike Lindup, guitarist Boon Gould, drummer/lyricist Phil Gould and studio-only whizz kid Wally Badarou on the verge of greatness and proved to be their breakthrough.

Having been sent to Los Angeles to work with Larry Dunn and Verdine White from Earth, Wind & Fire, the LP tweaked and commercialised the group's sound without losing their uniquely British take on jazz-funk.

While lead single *Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind* missed the UK Top 40, *Living It Up (The Sun Goes Down)* became the band's first Top 10, with the record going on to match its success.

Presented and packaged in line with the original release, the latest edition of the LP features the classic nine-track album in its entirety, without any additional material, but having just passed its milestone 40th anniversary it's a neat re-release for plugging any incomplete collections.

PAUL MCCARTNEY & WINGS
BAND ON THE RUN
★★★★☆
RELEASED: **February 2 *Capitol***
FORMATS: **2CD, 1LP Black Vinyl, 2LP Black Vinyl**

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of 'Band On The Run' - the third studio album by the British-American rock band and Paul McCartney's fifth since the breakup of The Beatles - the LP is newly reissued across formats.

The 1973 release was famously made under difficult circumstances, when band members Denny Seiwell and Henry McCullough left before recordings began in Lagos, Nigeria, leaving Paul, Linda and Denny Laine to push ahead and complete the project.

Collecting the US release, which includes the song *Helen Wheels*, there's also a bonus disc of unheard early mixes without overdubs, which were prepared by engineer Geoff Emerick on October 14, 1973, less than two months before the release of the album.

Removing the orchestral overdubs created by Tony Visconti and sequenced like the original analogue tapes discovered in the MPL archives, they feature on the double-disc editions, the vinyl of which has been half-speed mastered.

Packaged with two Linda McCartney Polaroid posters (2LP)/a 2-sided foldout poster (2CD), it's a cracking look back on the chart-topping and Grammy-winning record.

COCTEAU TWINS
MILK & KISSES
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **January 12 *Proper***
FORMATS: **1LP Black Vinyl**

By the time they released 'Milk & Honey', Cocteau Twins had already amassed a legacy by delivering some of the most unique and otherworldly music of the '80s.

Come 1996, vocalist Elizabeth Fraser, guitarist Robin Guthrie, and bassist Simon Raymonde had released their most successful album, 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' (1990), after which they moved to Mercury imprint Fontana for 'Four-Calendar Café' (1993) and set to work on its follow-up.

Released in the spring, the LP documents a turbulent period in the band's history, with tensions mounting with the label and between Fraser and Guthrie, who had recently separated. Because of this, Raymonde would work in the daytime, Guthrie at night, leaving Fraser to add her vocals, for a dreamy body of work that speaks of its circumstances.

Although often overlooked in their catalogue, retroactive remasting has offered a new clarity to the occasionally-muffled original recordings, with its latest release providing another opportunity to revisit and reassess the record. Any additional material is lacking, but in a climate where artists such as Billie Eilish and Lana Del Rey are at the top of their game, the LP has never sounded so current.

BUSTED
GREATEST HITS 2.0 (ANOTHER PRESENT FOR EVERYONE) / LIVE EDITION

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **January 5 *Absolute***
FORMATS: **CD, CD (Live Edition), 4x 2LP Coloured Vinyl Editions, Individual Member Cassettes**

Riding high on the chart-topping success of their first best-of album, the repackaged edition of 'Greatest Hits 2.0' collects additional live recordings and new material from the past six months.

Alongside the previously-released 'Hits' versions of their classic singles, including *Year 3000*, *Air Hostess*, *What I Go To School For* and *You Said No*, the new version comes on the back of the band's massive UK arena tour and the 20-song 'Live Edition' includes 10 songs direct from the tour.

If the re-recorded songs shine a light on the band's classics two decades on, the live audio captures the infectious energy of the Busted concert experience - an interim treat for fans ahead of their forthcoming summer series.

Meanwhile, the standard reissue includes the original tracklist with the addition of the band's latest single, *One Of These Days*, which they recorded in Los Angeles over the summer. It's one of two exclusive songs to the 'Greatest Hits 2.0' project, alongside *Good One*. And the 2LP vinyl formats bring together highlights from the record along with 10 'Guest Feature' versions, with contributions from McFly, James Arthur, Jonas Brothers and more.

A vast array of formats may be teetering on the edge of excessive, but who can blame the boys - fans are lapping it up!

GO WEST
DANCING ON THE COUCH

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **January 26 *Chrysalis***
FORMATS: **3CD+DVD, 2LP Clear Vinyl**

Celebrating the often overshadowed follow-up to Peter Cox and Richard Drummie's classic debut, Go West's 'Dancing On The Couch' is newly-expanded for a belated 35th anniversary reissue.

Featuring singles such as *True Colours*, *I Want To Hear It From You* and *The King Is Dead* (with BVs from Kate Bush), the album gave the duo a second UK Top 20 hit.

Presented across four discs, the original album appears alongside a second CD of B-sides, rarities and previously unreleased material, and a third CD featuring the Hammersmith Odeon show recorded on the 'Runaway Train' tour in 1987.

Additionally, the DVD includes promo videos from the period and the Hammersmith concert.

This set is packaged as a 7" hardcover book, complete with a 20-page booklet with photos, lyrics and new sleeve notes from the band.

Additionally, a 2LP edition on clear vinyl offers a bonus LP of remixes and rarities.

Although not quite the elaborate celebration their previous record warranted, content-wise this edition holds up and is a reminder, decades on, of the enduring quality of the band's work.

BELINDA CARLISLE
DECADES VOLUME 2: THE STUDIO ALBUMS PART 2

★★★☆☆

RELEASED: **January 26 *Edsel***
FORMATS: **4CD Media Book**

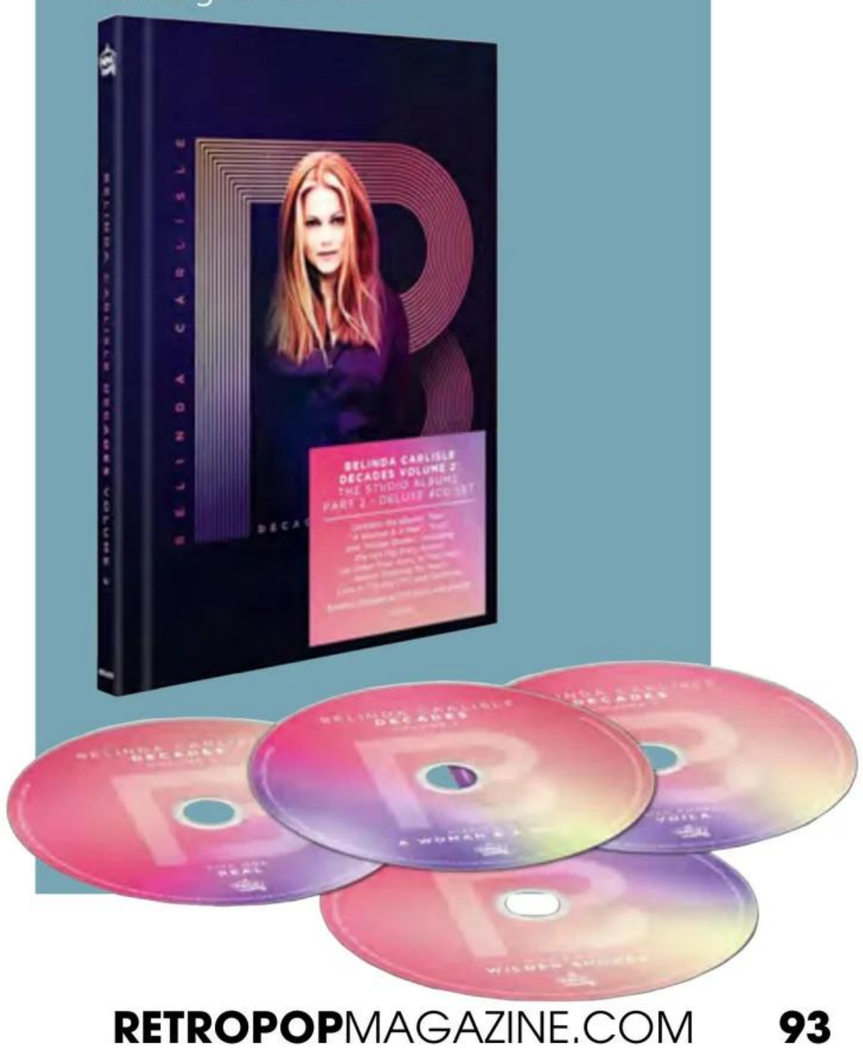
This second 4CD set revisits the latter portion of Belinda Carlisle's solo career, bringing together four albums from the 1990s and beyond.

Following the release of Volume 1 last year, it contains Belinda's last four albums: 'Real' (1993), 'A Woman And A Man' (1996), 'Voila' (2007) and 'Wilder Shores' (2017).

Arriving on the tail end of her most successful period, the first two albums feature six hits, including *Big Scary Animal*, *Lay Down Your Arms*, *In Too Deep*, *Always Breaking My Heart*, *Love In the Key Of C* and *California*.

Moving into the 21st century, 'Voila' features Belinda's covers of French songs, while 'Wilder Shores' brings together yoga chants set to new rock and pop melodies.

Packaged with a 36-page booklet including the lyrics and credits, plus annotation for each album - for 'Wilder Shores' by Belinda herself - and photos, it's a welcome reminder of her more overlooked work, and although free of any additional material and bonus content, a worthwhile addition to the Belinda Carlisle catalogue no less.



RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | **REISSUES** | COMPILATIONS

DEL AMITRI
CHANGE EVERYTHING
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **January 12 *Proper***
FORMATS: **1LP Black Vinyl**

Originally released in June 1992, the third album from Del Amitri and the follow-up to their breakthrough LP, 'Change Everything', returns to vinyl this month.

Mirroring the original UK release, the new edition of the No. 2-charting album boasts four UK Top 30 singles: *Always The Last to Know*, *Be My Downfall*, *Just Like A Man* and *When You Were Young*.

A varied and expansive selection, the record completes the band's progression from Scottish indie group to leftfield pop and now rock act, overseen by producer Gil Norton to capitalise on the success of their previous effort and its almost-Top 10 single, *Nothing Ever Happens*.

Matching that peak, lead single *Always The Last To Know* also became a Top 30 hit Stateside, spearheading the band's most successful period, with all 12 tracks emphasising the impact they had on the chart landscape of the decade going forward.

A clean reissue that faithfully replicates the original album, the material alone is worth the cost and a testament to Justin Currie, Iain Harvie, David Cummings, Andy Alston and Brian McDermott's work, over 30 years later.

THE FRAY
HOW TO SAVE A LIFE
★★★☆☆
RELEASED: **February 2 *Sony***
FORMATS: **1LP Yellow Vinyl**

The debut studio album from pop rockers The Fray returns to vinyl with a brand new yellow coloured pressing.

Featuring the hit title song, along with *Over My Head (Cable Car)* - both of which went Top 20 in the UK and Top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100 - the LP was a runaway success for the band and held the title for the best-selling digital album of all time until 2010, shifting over four million copies.

Remaining faithful to the original, the new edition contains the 12-song set, primarily written by band members Isaac Slade and Joe King, in full, with no bonus content featured this time around.

With its 20th anniversary on the horizon next year, here's hoping the latest release is intended purely to whet appetites for what's to come, but there's no escaping the strength of the record as a whole, which built upon the sound of British acts like Coldplay and Keane, and helped to further popularise it in the US and internationally.

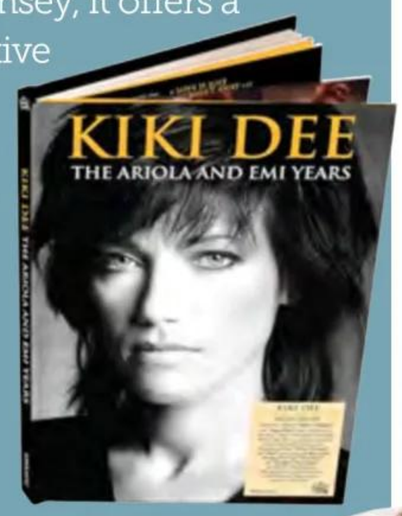
KIKI DEE
THE ARIOLA AND EMI YEARS
★★★★☆
RELEASED: **January 26 *Edsel***
FORMATS: **4CD**

Following the success of previous releases celebrating 'The Fontana And Motown Years' and 'The Rocket Years', the third book set in the series boasts four discs spotlighting the singer's 1980s releases.

Already an established artist at the time of signing to the label, on the back of a 'Greatest Hits' (1980) LP Kiki Dee launched into the decade as a household name with *Star* - the theme tune to 'Opportunity Knocks' - in 1981 and returned to the charts that year with 'Perfect Timing'.

That's included in this 4CD set, alongside Kiki's 1987 album, 'Angel Eyes', along with the previously-unreleased album, 'Two Sides To Every Story', which was recorded and produced by Pip Williams and mastered from the original production master tapes.

The final disc features the non-album singles A- and B-sides and remixes, plus three previously unreleased demos, mixed for this compilation. With annotation by Alan Robinson, based on new interviews with Kiki, Pip Williams and Chris Kimsey, it offers a new perspective on the fruits of a transitionary period in her career.



RELEASE RADAR

ALBUMS | REISSUES | COMPILATIONS

NOW 12" 80S – 1982 PART 1

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **January 19 Sony**
FORMATS: **4CD**

Across 4 CDs, 48 extended, full-length or remixed tracks document the ongoing shift from disco to synth-pop and new wave in 1982.

Placing a focus on the continued significance of the 12" single on the club scene, it showcases some of the bands who were at the forefront of the culture shift, including Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet and Visage.

The Human League's *Mirror Man*, Japan's *Life In Tokyo* and Gary Numan's *Music For Chameleons* are also included, alongside the disco-influenced *Why* from Carly Simon and pop classics from The Belle Stars with *The Clapping Song* and *My Camera Never Lies* from Bucks Fizz.

Disco, funk and soul standards sit alongside slices of alternative and indie-rock towards the end of the collection, proving the 12" format wasn't reserved exclusively for floor-fillers.

Rounding out with huge tracks from Trio, Thomas Dolby and Soft Cell, it makes for another impressive installment from a long-overdue celebration of the era.

NOW YEARBOOK EXTRA 1988

★★★☆☆

RELEASED: **January 12 Sony**
FORMATS: **3CD**

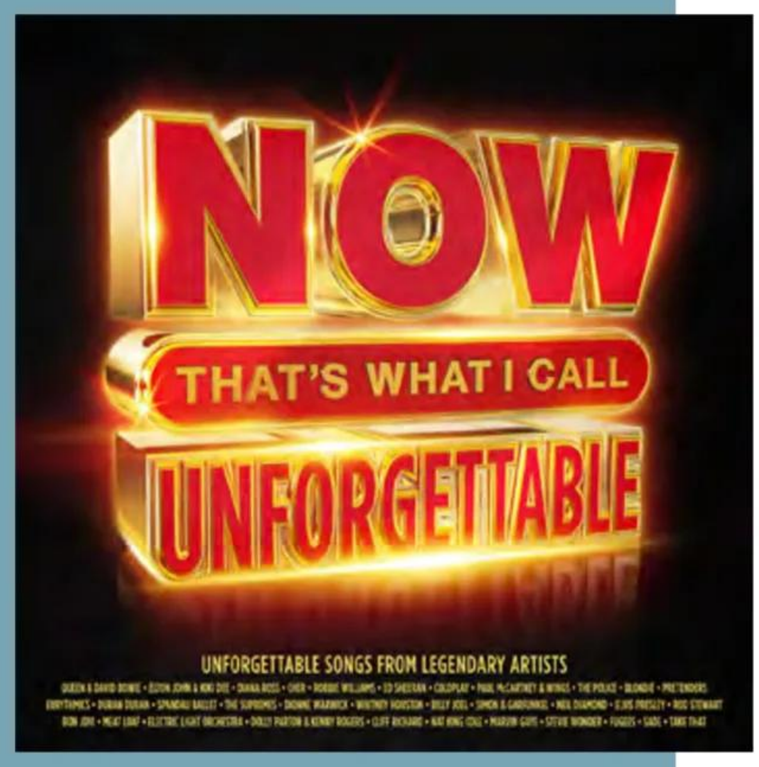
In a further celebration of 1988, NOW revisits the year with three more discs of pop gems.

George Michael kicks off an opening set that brings together synth-pop royalty Pet Shop Boys, New Order and a-ha, along with transatlantic classics from The Bangles (*In Your Room*) and Belinda Carlisle (*I Get Weak*).

Stock Aitken Waterman feature prominently with classics like *He Ain't No Competition* from Brother Beyond, Mel & Kim's *That's The Way It Is* and Kylie Minogue's *Got To Be Certain*, while the diversity of the charts is recognised with indie-pop from The Primitives and massive floorfillers from Krush, S'Express and The Beatmasters.

And there are more nods to the cultural events that influence the chart landscape, with Patrick Swayze and Wendy Fraser's *She's Like The Wind* from 'Dirty Dancing' and The Hollies' *He Ain't Heavy He's My Brother* - which rose to No. 1 following its inclusion in a Miller Lite beer ad - both coming in at the tail end.

As varied as the charts themselves, it's a fitting counterpart to the main '88 Yearbook.



NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL UNFORGETTABLE

★★★★☆

RELEASED: **January 26 Sony**
FORMATS: **4CD**

Bringing together 84 all-time greats from the past five decades, NOW delivers yet another unforgettable collection of classics.

Queen and David Bowie's *Under Pressure* opens a distinctly varied yet universally accessible compilation of monster-hits that spans Blondie, Elton John and Kiki Dee, and Neil Diamond, to Lady Gaga, Maroon 5 and P!nk.

Not restricted by genre lines, singalong moments from The Supremes (*You Keep Me Hangin' On*), Journey (*Don't Stop Believin'*) and Soft Cell (*Tainted Love*) appear with ballads from Amy Winehouse (*Love Is A Losing Game*), Dido (*White Flag*) and Ed Sheeran (*Thinking Out Loud*), with the focus placed firmly on cultural moments from across the years.

Rarely on sets such as these would Madness be nestled among Petula Clark and Dusty Springfield, but it only adds to a cross-generation appeal and reinforces that a good song never goes out of fashion.

From arms in the air crowd-pleasers to sing your heart out anthems, there's plenty here for fans of all ages.

RELEASE RADAR

Coming soon...

NEW MUSIC

ZARA LARSSON
VENUS
RELEASED:
February 9
Epic
FORMATS:
CD, 1LP Red & Black Marbled Vinyl

Featuring the hit single *Can't Tame Her*, the fourth LP from the Swedish star is a "pop album fit for a goddess", according to a press release.

USHER
COMING HOME
RELEASED:
February 11
mega/gamma.
FORMATS:
CD, 2LP Clear Vinyl

Coinciding with his Super Bowl Halftime Show, the record marks his first solo album in nearly eight years since 2016's 'Hard II Love'.

JENNIFER LOPEZ
THIS IS ME... NOW
RELEASED:
February 16
BMG
FORMATS:
TBA

The sequel to her 2002 LP, 'This Is Me... Then', is the ninth album from the US superstar and her first long-player in a decade.

PALOMA FAITH
THE GLORIFICATION OF SADNESS
RELEASED:
February 16
Sony
FORMATS:
CD, 1LP Black Vinyl, 1LP Eco Vinyl

The sixth album from the singer-songwriter is a bold statement of independence, led by the single *How To Leave A Man*.

KAISER CHIEFS
KAISER CHIEFS' EASY EIGHTH ALBUM
RELEASED:
March 1 ***V2***
FORMATS: **CD, 1LP Transparent Blue Vinyl, 1LP White Vinyl, Cassette**

Ricky Wilson and co. return with a new sound for their eighth LP, featuring the singles *How 2 Dance* and *Jealousy*.

BANANARAMA
GLORIOUS: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION
RELEASED:
March 8
London
FORMATS:
2CD, 3CD Deluxe Edition, 1LP Red Vinyl, 3LP Gold Vinyl, 3LP Deluxe Red Vinyl, 2Cassette

Celebrating over four decades of hits, Sara Dallin and Keren Woodward collect 40 of their favourite recordings from across the years.

SARAH JANE MORRIS
THE SISTERHOOD
RELEASED:
March 8 ***Fallen Angel***
FORMATS:
CD, Standard Black Vinyl

The singer-songwriter celebrates the lives of 10 female artists who have inspired her throughout her career.

LENNY KRAVITZ
BLUE ELECTRIC LIGHT
RELEASED:
March 15 ***BMG***
FORMATS:
CD, Deluxe CD, 2LP Blue and Pink Vinyl, 2LP Picture Disc

Largely self-written and performed, the 12th LP from the superstar continues to showcase his mastery of deep-soul rock 'n roll.

SHERYL CROW
EVOLUTION
RELEASED:
March 29 ***Big Machine***
FORMATS:
CD, 1LP Black Vinyl

Having previously signalled the end of her record-releasing career, the country star makes a surprise return following her Hall Of Fame induction.

GABRIELLE
A PLACE IN YOUR HEART
RELEASED:
May 10 ***BMG***
FORMATS:
CD, 1LP Transparent Curacao Blue Vinyl

The follow-up to her Top 5 covers collection, the soul superstar returns with her first collection of original material in six years.

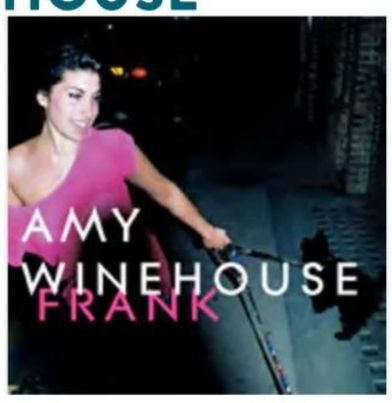
SIA
REASONABLE WOMAN
RELEASED:
May
Atlantic
FORMATS:
1LP Tangerine Vinyl, 1LP Clear Vinyl

The first album from the Australian pop star in eight years, including the lead single *Gimme Love*.

For all the latest RETROPOP releases visit RETROPOPMAGAZINE.COM

LOOKING BACK

AMY WINEHOUSE
FRANK



RELEASED: **February 2** ***Island***
FORMATS: **2LP Picture Disc Vinyl**
In line with its 20th anniversary, the debut album from the late star is repressed as a picture disc set for the first time.

BELINDA CARLISLE
LIVE YOUR LIFE BE FREE

RELEASED: **February 2** ***Demon***
FORMATS: **1LP Half-Speed Master Black Vinyl**
Following a National Album Day picture disc release, the fourth album from Belinda - featuring the hit title track - arrives newly remastered.

DELTA GOODREM
WINGS OF THE WILD, CHILD OF THE UNIVERSE, I HONESTLY LOVE YOU
RELEASED: **February 2** ***Music On Vinyl***
FORMATS: **White & Black Marbled Vinyl, 2LP Silver Vinyl, Translucent Magenta Vinyl**
The fourth and fifth albums - plus soundtrack to the Australian biographical miniseries 'Olivia: Hopelessly Devoted to You' - on vinyl for the first time.

MARIAH CAREY
MUSIC BOX: 30TH ANNIVERSARY EXPANDED EDITION
RELEASED: **February 2** ***Sony***
FORMATS: **3CD, 4LP Black Vinyl**

The classic chart-topping album repackaged with additional, previously-unreleased content and a full live show.

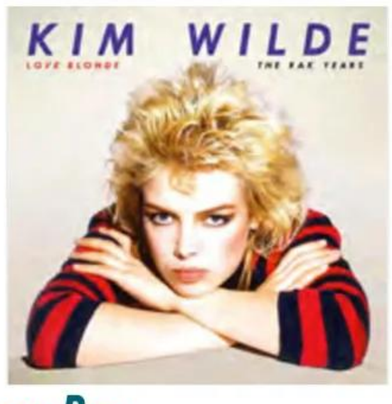
DEAD OR ALIVE
STILL SPINNIN': THE SINGLES COLLECTION

RELEASED: **February 16** ***Edsel***
FORMATS: **27CD Box Set**
Celebrating the group's legacy, this latest retrospective set collects the band's singles right through to the recent 'Fan the Flame (Part 2): The Resurrection'.

KYLIE MINOGUE
BODY LANGUAGE

RELEASED: **February 23** ***BMG***
FORMATS: **1LP Red Blooded Vinyl**
The ninth album from the pop icon - featuring the chart-topping *Slow* - celebrates its 20th anniversary by making its vinyl debut.

KIM WILDE
LOVE BLONDE: THE RAK YEARS

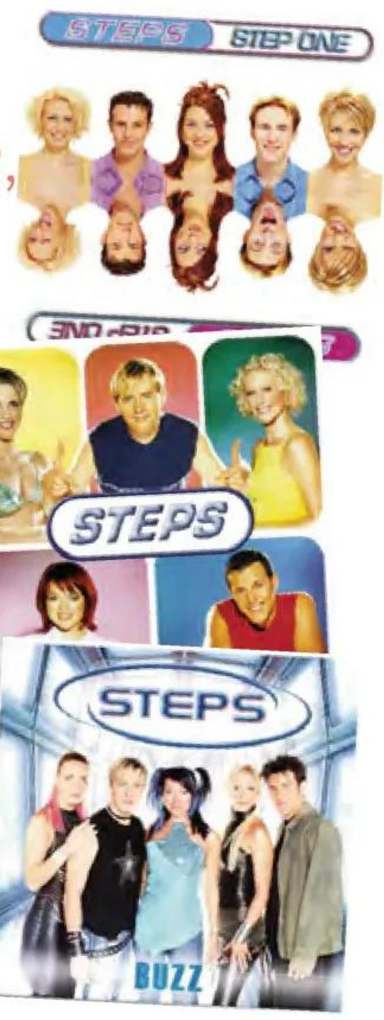


RELEASED: **February 23** ***Cherry Pop***
FORMATS: **4CD**
The first three albums - 'Kim Wilde' (1981), 'Select' (1982) and 'Catch As Catch Can' (1983) - expanded with bonus tracks, plus a disc of 'Special Disco Mixes'.

SUEDE
BLOODSPORTS

RELEASED: **February 23** ***Demon***
FORMATS: **2CD, 1LP Black Vinyl**
The band's sixth album, remastered and packaged with a bonus disc of non-album B-sides for its 10th anniversary.

STEPS
STEP ONE, STEPTACULAR, BUZZ



RELEASED: **February 2** ***Demon***
FORMATS: **StepSwirl™ Coloured Vinyl, Neon Coloured Vinyl, Zoetrope Picture Disc**
The first three albums from the pop group pressed on vinyl for the first time in an array of vibrant editions.

BELINDA CARLISLE
REAL

RELEASED: **April 19** ***Demon***
FORMATS: **1LP Half-Speed Master Black Vinyl, 1LP Picture Disc Vinyl**
The fifth solo album from The Go-Go's star gets the reissue treatment with a pair of vinyl pressings in line with previous releases.

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

How well do you know your **boy bands**? Test your knowledge on the best of the past four decades...

1 Before becoming a global superstar, Harry Styles was a member of which 'X Factor' runners-up boy band?

2 Which '80s group, starring the Kemp brothers, scored classic hits with *True* and *Gold*?

3 Justin Timberlake first found fame as a member of which '90s boy band?

4 *I Want It That Way* propelled which '90s group to global superstardom?

5 In the mid-'80s, Duran Duran splintered and formed which side-projects?

6 Nathan Moore has been a member of which two boy bands?

7 Robbie Williams was just 16 when he shot to fame as a member of which boy band?

8 The singer-songwriter known mononymously as Preston was first a member of The Ordinary Boys. What's their biggest hit?

9 Which Irish boy band landed hits with covers of songs by The Four Seasons, The Osmonds and The Bee Gees?

10 Which US sibling trio first became famous for their work on the Disney Channel?

11 What does JLS stand for?

12 Which boy band's members included Nick Lachey and his brother Drew Lachey?

13 Originally starring the Whalberg brothers, which teen boy band launched to the top of the charts in the late '80s?

14 Girls Aloud beat which 'Popstars: The Rivals' boy band to Christmas No. 1?

15 Before starring in The Wanted, Max George was a member of which boy band?

16 *Take Me On* and *The Sun Always Shines on T.V.* gave which Norwegian group US chart-topping hits in the '80s?

17 Before managing acts such as Beverley Knight, Anastacia and Dido, Craig Logan was a member of which chart-topping boy band?

18 Limahl fronted which British boy band?

19 Which boy band represented the UK at the 2011 Eurovision Song Contest with *I Can*?

20 Stock Aitken Waterman helped which boy band into the UK Top 5 with their cover of *Blame It On The Boogie*?

ANSWERS: **1** One Direction; **2** Spandau Ballet?; **3** *NSYNC; **4** Backstreet Boys; **5** The Power Station and Arcadia; **6** Brother Beyond and Worlds Apart; **7** Take That; **8** *Boys Will Be Boys*; **9** Boyzone; **10** Jonas Brothers; **11** Jack the Lad Swing; **12** 98 Degrees; **13** New Kids On The Block; **14** One True Voice; **15** Avenue; **16** a-ha; **17** Bros; **18** Kajagoogoo; **19** Blue; **20** Big Fun

PHOTO RAY BURMISTON

DEPECHE MODE

Memento Mori

TOMORROW'S HERE TODAY

LIGHTNING SEEDS

35 YEARS GREATEST HITS TOUR

NOVEMBER 2024

FRI 08 ***SHEFFIELD*** LEADMILL
SAT 09 ***NORWICH*** THE WATERFRONT
THU 14 ***NOTTINGHAM*** ROCK CITY
FRI 15 ***CARDIFF*** TRAMSHED
THU 21 ***BRISTOL*** O2 ACADEMY
FRI 22 ***OXFORD*** O2 ACADEMY
SAT 23 ***BEXHILL*** DE LA WARR PAVILION
THU 28 ***NEWCASTLE*** BOILERSHOP
FRI 29 ***GLASGOW*** GARAGE
SAT 30 ***DUBLIN*** ACADEMY

DECEMBER 2024

SUN 01 ***BELFAST*** LIMELIGHT
THU 05 ***MANCHESTER*** ALBERT HALL
FRI 06 ***LEEDS*** BECKETT STUDENTS' UNION
SAT 07 ***LIVERPOOL*** OLYMPIA
THU 12 ***CAMBRIDGE*** JUNCTION
FRI 13 ***LONDON*** O2 FORUM KENTISH TOWN
SAT 14 ***WOLVERHAMPTON*** WULFRUN HALL

'TOMORROW'S HERE TODAY'
GREATEST HITS ALBUM OUT 4TH OCTOBER 2024